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by Rob Cowan

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# February highlights

from EMI and Virgin Classics



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## A Lesson in Love

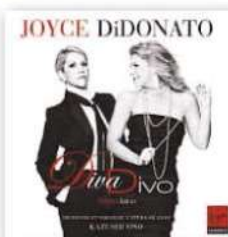
**Kate Royal**

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**The Times**

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### Mahler: Symphony No. 2

**Simon Rattle, Berliner Philharmoniker**

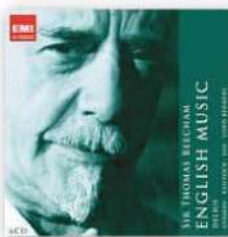
Sir Simon leads the Berliner Philharmoniker in this live recording of Mahler’s epic Symphony No. 2 “Resurrection” with the Rundfunkchor Berlin and star soloists Kate Royal and Magdalena Kožená.



### Scarlatti: Sonatas

**Alexandre Tharaud**

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### The English Collection

**Sir Thomas Beecham**

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**Elisabeth Schwarzkopf**

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# GRAMOPHONE

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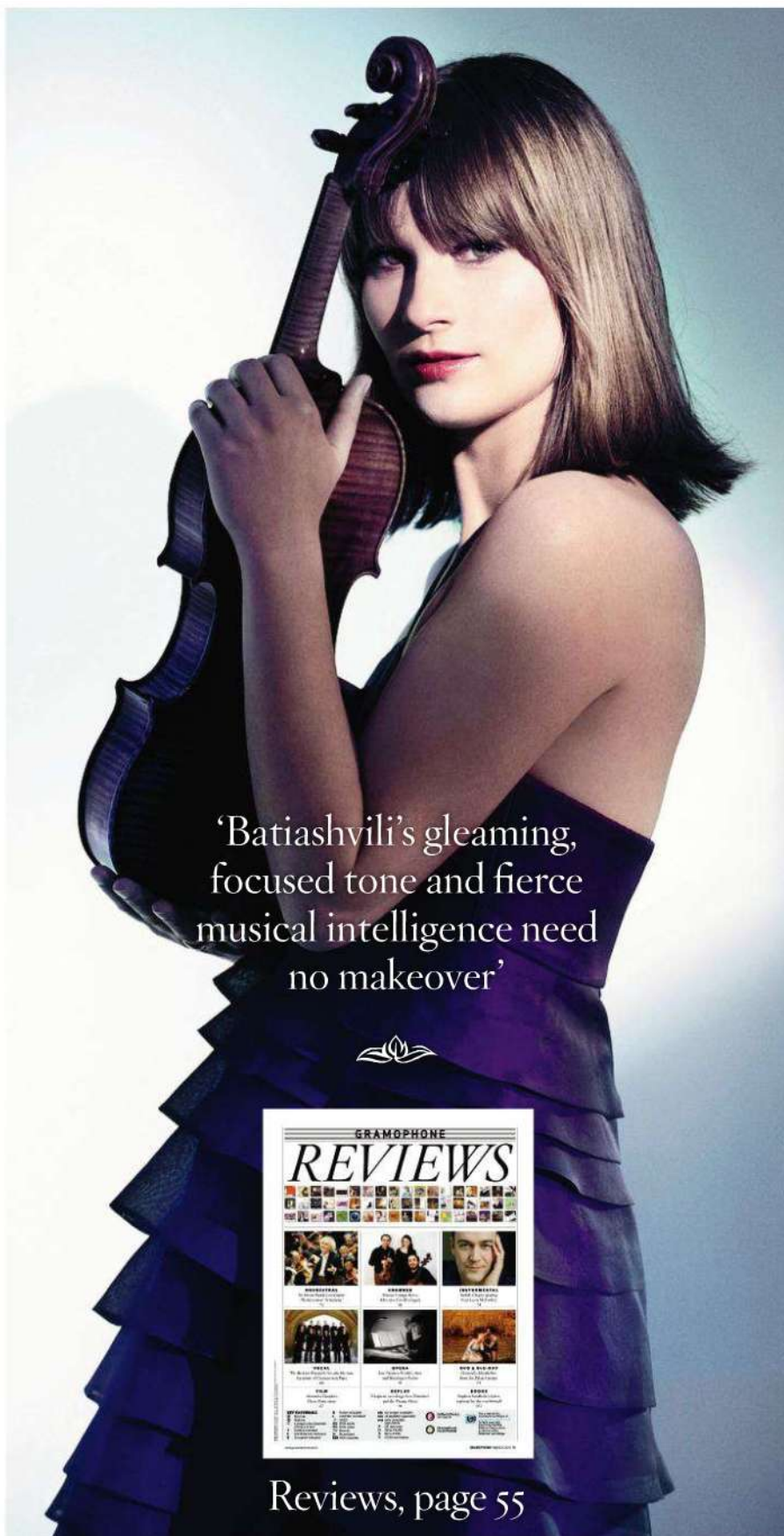
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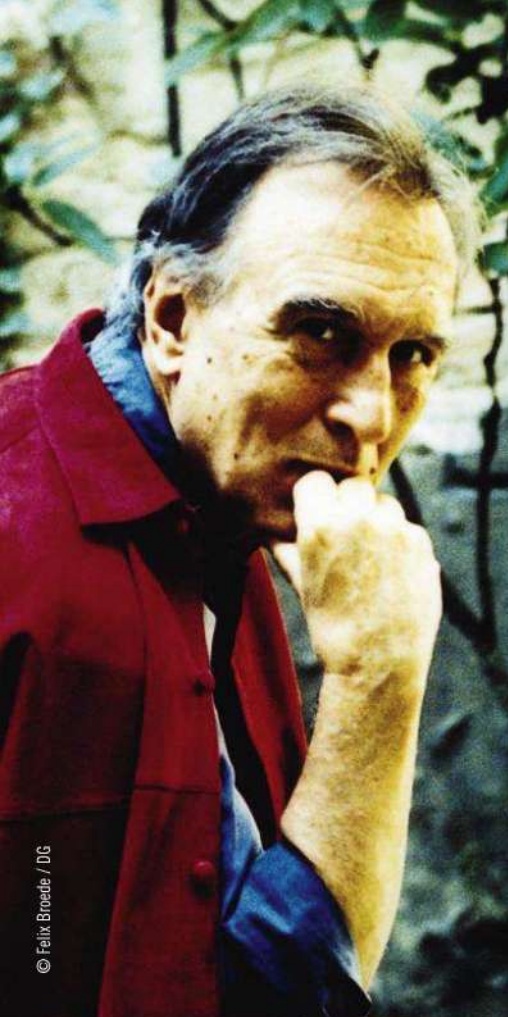
'Batiashvili's gleaming,  
focused tone and fierce  
musical intelligence need  
no makeover'

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#### EDITORIAL

Phone 020 8267 5136 Fax 020 8267 5844  
e-mail [gramophone@haymarket.com](mailto:gramophone@haymarket.com)

#### EDITOR

James Inverne

#### DEPUTY EDITOR

Sarah Kirkup / 020 8267 5829

#### REVIEWS EDITOR

James McCarthy / 020 8267 5125

#### EDITOR, GRAMOPHONE ONLINE

Martin Cullingford / 020 8267 5044

#### PRODUCTION EDITOR

Antony Craig / 020 8267 5874

#### STAFF WRITER

Charlotte Smith / 020 8267 5155

#### SUB-EDITOR

David Thresher / 020 8267 5155

#### ACTING ART EDITOR

Lisa Irving

#### AUDIO EDITOR

Andrew Everard / 020 8267 5029

#### PICTURE EDITOR

Sumita Sharma-Gibson / 020 8267 5861

#### EDITORIAL AND PUBLISHING CO-ORDINATOR

Sue McWilliams / 020 8267 5136

#### GRAMOPHONE SECRETARY

Libby McPhee

#### LIBRARIAN

Francesco Burns

#### ADVERTISING

Phone 020 8267 5060 Fax 020 8267 5866

e-mail [ashley.murison@haymarket.com](mailto:ashley.murison@haymarket.com)

#### COMMERCIAL HEAD

Ashley Murison / 020 8267 5853

#### SALES MANAGER

Laura Hurford / 020 8267 5959

#### SENIOR SALES EXECUTIVE

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Paul Prinnel / 020 8267 5976

#### PRODUCTION CONTROLLER

Geeta Chambers / 020 8267 5588

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

08456 777823 (UK only)

+44 (0)795 582 980 (overseas)

[gramophone@servicehelpline.co.uk](mailto:gramophone@servicehelpline.co.uk)

US & Canada 1-866-918-1446

[haymarket@imsnews.com](mailto:haymarket@imsnews.com)

#### PUBLISHING

Phone 020 8267 5136 Fax 020 8267 5844

#### PUBLISHER

Kate Law

[kate.law@haymarket.com](mailto:kate.law@haymarket.com)

#### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

James Jolly

#### BRAND MANAGER

Luca Da Re / 020 8267 5182

#### LICENSING DIRECTOR

Tim Bailey / 020 8267 5078

[tim.bailey@haymarket.com](mailto:tim.bailey@haymarket.com)

#### GROUP PRODUCTION MANAGER

Stuart White / 020 8267 5420

#### DIRECT MARKETING MANAGER

Maxine Poole / [maxine.poole@haymarket.com](mailto:maxine.poole@haymarket.com)

#### HAYMARKET CONSUMER MEDIA

#### DESIGN DIRECTOR

Paul Harpin

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Mark Payton

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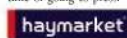
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Kevin Costello

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## Our Contributors



**PHILIP CLARK** is one of *Gramophone's* most regular contributors. For this issue he has interviewed the minimalist master Steve Reich, in advance of a retrospective of the composer's music at the Barbican in London.



Distinguished actor and director **DANIEL EVANS** recently won an Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Musical for Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*. This month, he reviews Sondheim's book of lyrics, *Finishing the Hat*.



**SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE** is one of Europe's leading composers. He reveals the inspiration behind three of his works being released on the NMC label in this month's *Diary*.

## Our Reviewers

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Nalen Anthoni

Mike Ashman

Philip Clark

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Justin Davidson

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Peter Dickinson

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Duncan Druce

Adrian Edwards

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\* Contributing editor

## EDITORIAL

# GRAMOPHONE

Founded in 1923 by Sir Compton Mackenzie and Christopher Stone as 'an organ of candid opinion for the numerous possessors of gramophones'

## Beecham: far more than a great wit



Everyone who knows anything about Sir Thomas Beecham has their favourite Beecham story. Mine is the one about the man he met while walking, shortly after his second wife's death. When the man asked where his wife was, the conductor replied, "She's taking tea." Telling pause. "With Vaughan Williams." The English composer had also passed on around that time.

As a witty raconteur, Beecham had no equals in music this side of the Atlantic.

It might be argued that not until Leonard Bernstein's comet blazed over New York was there another conductor to rival his unforgettable turns of phrase.

But there was more to Beecham, qualities that sometimes get overlooked precisely because of the great quips. The sense of spontaneous brilliance that he drew from orchestras across a wide range of repertoire was staggering and justly celebrated (and happily it was caught many

'Beecham effectively shaped London's music scene, founding both the London and Royal Philharmonics and pouring money into top-grade opera seasons'

times on record). This year is the 50th since his own death and to mark the occasion Rob Cowan's affectionate pen portrait of the man tries to pin down exactly how he achieved a freedom in music-making that none of his English contemporaries mastered (yes, I'm standing by for outraged letters from devotees of Sir Adrian Boult and Sir Malcolm Sargent, though I remain a great admirer of theirs).

Beecham was not only the most acclaimed of his peers, he effectively shaped London's music scene, founding both the London and Royal Philharmonics and pouring money into top-grade opera seasons to boot. Cowan, a great authority on musicians of that period (and most others, come to think of it) has spoken to many people who knew Beecham personally and played under him. We've also collated details of some of the most fascinating previously unreleased recordings of the conductor due out this year.

Still more developments online. *Gramophone* has now released a digital edition, so you can subscribe and enjoy it via your phone or computer! See [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) for details.



*James*





# Notes & Letters

A little Liszt • Choral controversies • Toscanini on trial • Remembering Shirley Verrett

## Liszt's love life

While grateful that Jeremy Nicholas has written on Liszt at the outset of the bicentenary year (February, page 34), why is the major highlighted sentence ("His dalliances were the talk of Europe – he had at least 26 major love affairs and fathered several illegitimate children") devoted to his love life? Moreover, it is inaccurate. Presumably, the figure 26 is taken from the 26 discussed in *Liszt und die Frauen* (La Mara, 1911). In no way were all of these "major love affairs". Of these, there were, perhaps, five: Marie d'Agoult, Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, Agnes Street-Klindworth, Emilie Merian-Genast and, probably, Olga von Meyendorff. The youthful "affairs" with Caroline de Saint-Cricq and Adèle de La Prunarède might also be counted, while Caroline Unger, Marie Pleyel and Charlotte von Hagn are more of the nature of "one-night stands". As for his "fathering several illegitimate children", he legitimised the three children born to him by Marie d'Agoult and there is no evidence to suggest that he fathered any others.

It is also wrong to state that Hanslick "detested" Liszt. He



Liszt: less of the love

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Collection praise

Hats off, everyone, for Bryce Morrison's magisterial survey of the many recordings of Schubert's B flat Piano Sonata (The Collection, January, page 46). Under the sheer weight of numbers, mere mortals among music critics would have resorted to standard clichés, occasional passages of purple prose or lame superlatives. BM contrives to be illuminating and convincing even at his most trenchant (see how he puts Ashkenazy in his place with half a dozen words).

There is a wide cultural range in evidence here, a clarity of insight and a deep humanity, all brought to bear on one of the most moving works in the piano repertoire. Again, chapeau!

And the final choice? It would be tantamount to lese-majesty to disagree. I once had the privilege of discussing the work with Clifford Curzon. Irascible he might have been but he was also honest and generous. I think he would have nodded approval at the mention of Wilhelm Kempff.

Harvey Mitchell, Castlemaine, Victoria, Australia



Wilhelm Kempff, a worthy winner

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classical music sites on the internet. The letter of the month receives £50 of Presto Classical gift vouchers. Please send letters for publication in the April issue by February 14.

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disliked his music, which is not the same thing. He praised his playing in January 1874, when Liszt performed in a charity concert in Vienna, 27 years after he had retired from the concert platform, stating that he "plays the most difficult music with the

ease and freshness of youth".

Michael Short  
Eastbourne, E Sussex, UK

### A lasting influence

Jeremy Nicholas has not been fair to Liszt. In addition to the Second

Viennese school, who learnt from Liszt's late works, Liszt exercised a great influence on most of his contemporaries – Smetana, Dvořák (in the tone-poems), but above all Wagner.

In an extensive account of the close relationship of the two musicians in *The Music of Liszt*, Humphrey Searle is supported by Sacheverell Sitwell, who has a chapter on Liszt and Wagner, and 27 mentions of Wagner according to the index of his book.

According to Wagner's own account, he really got to know Liszt for the first time when they met in July 1853. Liszt then played to Wagner his symphonic poems and sketches for *A Faust Symphony*. Wagner began to write *Das Rheingold* in November 1853 and *Die Walküre* was written in 1854, the same year that von Bülow gave the first performance of *A Faust Symphony*. We know that in 1856, while still working on *The Ring*, Wagner studied Liszt's symphonic poems; but more than that, in a letter of 1859 to von Bülow, Wagner wrote that it was known only to his friends that "since my acquaintance with Liszt's compositions, my treatment of harmony has become very different from what it was formerly".

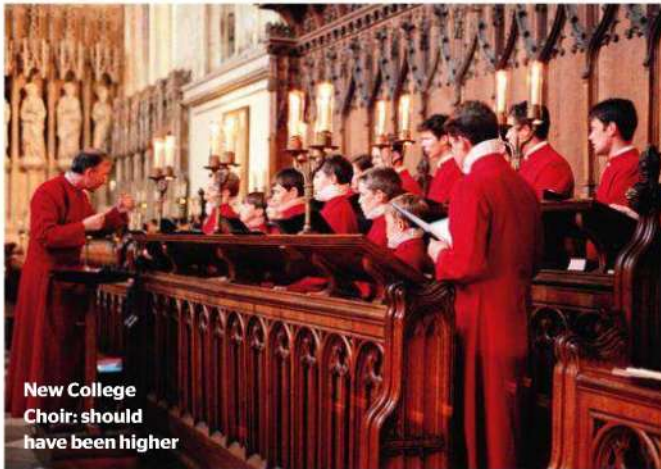
Few people gave Liszt credit as a serious musician in his own lifetime. It is time that this was corrected. It should not be known only to a few that Wagner's *Ring* would not be as it now stands but for the music of Liszt.

JMT Yorke  
Wimborne, Dorset, UK

## Beethoven myth

Jeremy Nicholas's article on Liszt was illustrated with a picture of Beethoven kissing the young prodigy at a public concert in 1823. This never happened and was fabricated by one of





Liszt's early biographers. It was impossible because Beethoven was completely deaf by 1823, and so would never have wasted his time attending a Liszt recital, especially as he hated child prodigies anyway. Liszt himself floated a version of this story towards the end of his life. In his account he visited Beethoven in 1822 in his lodgings within the Schwarzpaukhaus in Vienna and played for the great master for some time before being kissed by him. Beethoven did not move into the Schwarzpaukhaus until 1825, so the story is unbelievable on factual grounds, too.

Many artists have a vested interest in constructing myths about themselves and this tale is yet another example of the genre. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine Beethoven in his latter years kissing anyone beyond his close circle of relatives and friends, and especially a stranger aged 11 or 12. The curmudgeon was far more likely to have sent Liszt packing with a clip round the ear and the injunction to obtain a proper musical education, and stop wasting his talents giving prodigy recitals. Such a story would have been far more believable than the very 19th-century sentimental drivel we are asked to accept.

*Eric Shames  
Acton, London, UK*

## Children's choirs

In considering your list of the world's best choirs (January, page 32), I am especially struck by the relative ranking of the "choirs for children". Placing

King's College and Wells Cathedral above New College seems odd to me, especially in light of your own editorial comment that the primary criterion for judging was "recordings of recent years." What has King's recorded lately that would stand comparison with New College's magisterial three-volume survey of 20th-century masters? And what has Wells done to match New College's groundbreaking traversal of core repertoire, in which boys' voices are restored to central importance (Bach's *St John Passion*, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Monteverdi's *Vespers* and the upcoming Mozart Requiem)?

*Marty Sieve  
Lake George, MN, USA*

## Choral omission

Frankly, your panel seems to have limited knowledge of the British choral scene, as arguably the finest cathedral choir in the world is that of Westminster Cathedral, London. This choir of boys and men, under its inspirational director of music, Martin Baker, is not even included in your selected list. Anyone who has heard the choir in the flesh or on one of many recordings on Hyperion will certainly agree that this is a catastrophic omission. Westminster Cathedral Choir sings a wide spectrum of music from plainsong and Palestrina to cutting-edge, 21st-century commissions from composers such as James MacMillan, Roxanna Panufnik and others.

All the fundamental elements are present in their performances: quality of sound, ensemble, rhythmic precision, dynamic range and, above all, a natural musicality, so often absent from many performances.

Your panel did get the mixed voice choirs right, however, by choosing Polyphony and the Monteverdi Choir, though there are others, not listed, who are very good indeed, such as Ex Cathedra, the Birmingham choir.  
*Peter Smith  
Malvern, Wores, UK*

all the notes as written in an era when conductors often did not; but his lifelong struggle was, as he himself said, to achieve "my ideal dream, that is, to come as close as possible to expressing the author's thoughts" – a very different matter. After all, hundreds of conductors have since aimed at giving all the notes as written – but none has sounded in the least like Toscanini.

*Christopher Dymant  
Welwyn, Herts, UK*

## Verrett remembered

If I may presume to correct John Steane in his tribute to the late Shirley Verrett (January, page 10), he states that "at Covent Garden...she was given opportunities that never came her way at the Met". At Covent Garden she sang Ulrica, Orfeo, Carmen, Azucena, Amneris, Eboli, Norma, Tosca and Dalila, and at the Met, Carmen, Azucena, Amneris, *Les Troyens*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, *L'assedio di Corinto*, *Norma* (both roles), Madame Lidoine in Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, *La favorita*, *Tosca*, *Fidelio*, *Dalila* and *Macbeth*. Clearly, this statement should be the other way round!

*Anna Martin, London, UK*





## OBITUARY

## Lady Macbeth

No writer is more expert on voices than John Steane but he makes a highly puzzling omission from his obituary of Shirley Verrett. Her triumph as Lady Macbeth under Abbado at La Scala in 1975 provided conclusive proof that she did, indeed, make it into "the very front rank" – no matter what PG Davis might have said in his book on American opera singers. The photo accompanying Mr Steane's piece adds a further level of irony to the omission: it shows Verrett taking a curtain call at La Scala – as Lady Macbeth. *Yebuda Shapiro, via e-mail*

## God's own music?

I find Richard Eyre's piece (January, page 25) disturbingly religious-centric. It is a cliché to refer to music as a universal language but, like all clichés, it is so because it is true. To say that Beethoven's Ninth and Bruckner's symphonies are "the sound of God" is tantamount to laying a fence around them and saying: "Non-believers keep out, this is not for you!" To call it the "sound of God" is utterly to reduce the human to nothing more than a conduit, yet it is surely the very human in the music that is its key.

It was striving to express himself adequately to his god that makes Bruckner's symphonies communicate; it is the expression of human striving for a better world for humanity that makes Beethoven's Ninth Symphony communicate – not "the sound of God" then, but the sound of human hope, fear, endeavour and spirit (with a small "s"). Take the music to have religious meaning if you want, as many do, which is perfectly fine, but don't put it in a compound marked "religious". The music of Beethoven and Bruckner is wonderful partly because it is far too universal for that religious appropriation; how else could it mean so much to so many of the non-religious? *Christopher Pugh  
Belper, Derbyshire, UK*

## Editorial notes

In Jonathan Freeman-Attwood's feature on Junior music departments (February, page 40), the copy should have read: "At the Royal Academy, Jonathan Willcocks (son of Sir David and a distinguished composer and educationalist) took the Junior Academy *from the late '80s* and transformed it..." We apologise for the error, which was entirely ours.

We stated that the Naxos disc of Bizet's *Clovis et Clotilde* was the work's first recording (February, page 13). In fact, there is a recording from 1988, also by Casadesu, available on Apex 0927 48995-2.

Our review of Iván Fischer's Channel Classics recording of Beethoven's Symphonies Nos 4 and 6 (January, page 59) took its editor to task for a moment of "dead sound". This was wrongly attributed to the editor when in fact it was a musical decision on the part of the conductor. The instance cited, the moment before the muted horn's solo entry on the final page of the *Pastoral*, does contain a musical pause where none is present in the score that our reviewer found off-putting, but checks have revealed that this pause emanated entirely from the conductor and orchestra. Apologies to the editor in question, Jared Sacks.

We incorrectly stated that Mark Padmore and Paul Lewis were recording *Die schöne Müllerin* (In the Studio, December, page 76) when, in fact, they were recording *Schwanengesang*.

*Rob Cowan writes:* I must apologise for a slip-up where I wrongly stated that Bruno Walter never recorded Schumann's Fourth Symphony commercially (Replay, February, page 101). Of course, had I paused to think a little longer, I would have recalled two versions on 78s, one with the Mozart Festival Orchestra, the other with the LSO. What I actually meant was that there was no other American recording. A senior moment, I'm afraid!



John Alldis:  
relished the new

**JOHN ALLDIS**  
**Choral Conductor**  
**Born August 10, 1929;**  
**died December 20, 2010**

The choral conductor John Alldis, who has died aged 81 in London, studied under Boris Ord, music director at King's College, Cambridge, and subsequently made his name as a pioneering conductor of contemporary choral music. If perceived wisdom proposes that the sorts of composers Alldis championed – Birtwistle, Finnis, Richard Rodney Bennett, David Bedford, Ferneyhough and Lutyens – stood in opposition to everything the Cambridge choral tradition represented, Alldis was a conductor of unique breadth. Renaissance music, and music by Vaughan Williams and Delius, remained part of his life, too.

The John Alldis Choir gave their debut concert in 1962 with the premiere of Alexander Goehr's *A Little Cantata of Proverbs*, and quickly became the first-call British choral group, infinitely dependable and versatile. They gave the European premiere of Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles* in 1972 under Boulez (and contributed to Boulez's complete recordings of Schoenberg and Webern), and were the house choir for Colin Davis's trailblazing 1970s Berlioz cycle for Philips. And word also reached The Duke: the Alldis Choir performed with Duke Ellington's Orchestra in 1973 at Westminster Abbey; the

resulting album, "Third Sacred Concert", was Ellington's last recording.

In 1966 Alldis founded the London Symphony Orchestra Chorus, and in the December 1967 issue of *Gramophone*, Edward Greenfield royally praised the Alldis Choir's recital disc of Schoenberg, Debussy, Messiaen and Bruckner – in the selection of Bruckner motets, "I was hardly prepared for [their] devotional intensity," he wrote. Later Alldis conducted the London Philharmonic Choir, and was guest conductor of the Netherlands Chamber Choir and Tokyo Philharmonic Chorus. His professional life was cut short by a devastating stroke in 2003.

Alldis's eldest son, jazz pianist and singer Dominic Alldis, tells me: "I would like my father to be remembered for his contribution to new music. After having been a chorister and choral scholar at King's, Cambridge, he relished the opportunity to create something new and exciting within English choral music. Composers in the '60s and '70s such as Goehr, Lutyens, Birtwistle, Maxwell Davies and Tavener encouraged him to form a professional choir to perform their music, and I recall him spending many hours preparing and deciphering their complex scores, always with diligence and respect. I now cherish the childhood memory of sitting in concert halls and windy churches imbibing this 'atonal' sound world!" **Philip Clark**



COMING NEXT MONTH

# GRAMOPHONE

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Since the pioneering days when Shostakovich and Vaughan Williams began scoring motion pictures the lines between film and classical music have been blurred. Hugely popular, yet often dismissed, film music is rarely seriously discussed.

All that changes next month, with a packed special issue devoted to the 'classical' music of the movies. When is film music classical? Why does experimental music succeed better on screen? How were Copland, Shostakovich and Korngold affected by their forays into films? For answers to the most fascinating questions around film music, don't miss it.

### Also in the April issue

The *Gramophone* Collection: Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia antartica* started life as the soundtrack to the film *Scott of the Antarctic*. Geoffrey Norris finds the best performance on disc

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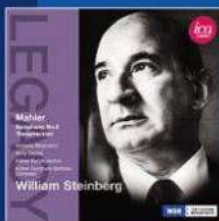
ICAC 5000

Maria Callas



ICAC 5006

William Steinberg



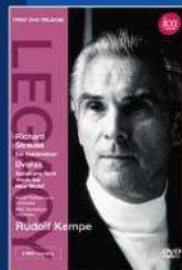
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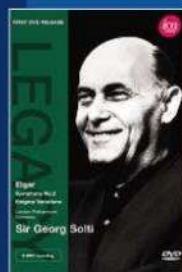
ICAD 5009

David Oistrakh



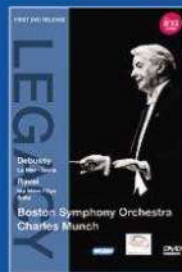
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To see all releases from ICA Classics, please visit:  
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# Editor's Choice

James Inverne's pick of this month's outstanding new discs - hear excerpts online



You can hear substantial excerpts from all of this month's Editor's Choices on the online *Gramophone* Player.

There you will also find links to buy, as well as other musical tracks and complete recordings linked to features in this and previous issues.

This month *Gramophone* pays tribute to the late, much-loved tenor Hugues Cuénod, who died recently at the age of 108. The *Gramophone* Player's "From the archive" section features a complete recording of Cuénod (below) singing English and French lute songs from the 16th and 17th centuries. It's a lovely recital, traversing Dowland, Morley, Crecquillon and others. Enjoy, all through the *Gramophone* Player at [www.gramophone.co.uk](http://www.gramophone.co.uk)



**HINDEMITH**  
Music for Viola and Orchestra  
Lawrence Power *vi*  
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / David Atherton  
Hyperion

If there is a viola player with a finer, more deeply ingrained feel for Hindemith's complex sound world than Lawrence Power I don't know his name. Our reviewer Guy Rickards hails this impactful new release as "the new market leader". Power's playing, single-minded in its intensity, superbly marries colour and profundity.

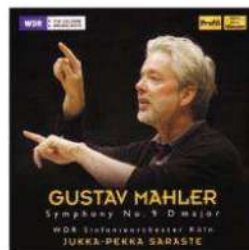
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



**MAHLER**  
Symphony No 2  
Kate Royal *sop* Magdalena Kožená *mez* Berlin Radio Choir; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Simon Rattle  
EMI

Here's my confession. I'm not a great fan of Simon Rattle's famous first recording of Mahler's Second Symphony (too deliberate, too planned). But there's nobody I'd rather hear conduct it live, where it crackles with a dangerous spontaneity. This new Berlin account is more satisfying than the first go, with some stunning playing.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**



**MAHLER**  
Symphony No 9  
WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Jukka-Pekka Saraste  
Profil

A knockout Mahler Ninth from Cologne comes (to me at any rate) as a complete surprise. Next to famed Mahlerians such as Rattle, Iván Fischer, Claudio Abbado et al, Jukka-Pekka Saraste has rather slipped under the radar. But don't miss this, a blistering performance that, without undue flamboyance, leaves you shattered. I'll be listening to it again - and often.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



**PIERNÉ**  
Piano Concerto, Op 12  
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*  
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Juanjo Mena  
Chandos

Two relatively recent Chandos recruits are showcased here to rather dazzling effect. Juanjo Mena, the BBC Phil's incoming chief conductor, makes a marvellously rich impression here. Bavouzet already feels like an old friend and turns in what we have already come to expect - a scintillating display of intelligent pianism. A hugely enjoyable disc.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**

## Reissue of the month



Are we in the middle of a Dvořák revival? I'm not sure why I think we might be, but in any case there have been some wonderful releases recently dedicated to this composer which have caught my ear (I'm still frequently returning to

the Emerson Quartet's "Old World - New World" album).

Yet the piano music tends to get forgotten about, strangely so, given that Dvořák started his musical life as a pianist and wrote so inventively for the instrument. So a hearty "thank you" to Brilliant Classics for disinterring Inna Poroshina's collection of the complete piano works. Recorded in Kiev in the late 1990s, they are simply wonderful. At super-budget price, don't hesitate.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**

## DVD & Blu-ray of the month



Hands up if you've seen Gounod's opera *Mireille*. Not many, I suspect, and if you have you can feel justifiably smug about the fact, since it is rarely done.

In terms of box-office pulling-power, *Faust* it isn't. It's actually jolly good, a tale about forbidden love which ultimately involves pilgrimages through the desert, witchcraft, you know the kind of thing. This production is by Nicolas Joel, his calling-card as the new director of the Paris Opéra National.

Very fine it is too, and well cast (Inva Mula is one of those sopranos whose fame hasn't quite equalled her talents). Give it a try.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**



# Lisa Batiashvili plays Shostakovich: 'This unmissable disc is Lisa Batiashvili's first great recording.'



## VIVALDI

Flute Concertos  
Arte Dei Suonatori /  
Alexis Kossenko *fl*  
Alpha  
No, this isn't a case of  
the usual suspects – Arte  
Dei Suonatori are more  
cunning than that. They  
mix up some expected  
favourites with relative  
strangers and what is  
there is filled with a sense  
of scholarly adventure.  
The absorbing booklet  
essays by the flautist  
Alexis Kossenko almost  
have a sense of quest to  
them, while his and his  
colleagues' playing is full  
of colour and character.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



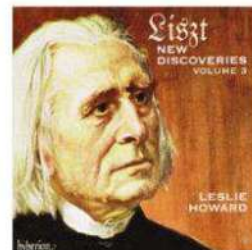
**BARTÓK** Sonata for Two  
Pianos and Percussion  
**RIHM** Schrift-Um-Schrift  
Franz Schindlbeck,  
Jan Schlichte *perc*  
GrauSchumacher Duo  
Neos  
Musical hands join across  
the decades here, in a  
fascinating new release  
that couples the conflicted  
restlessness of Bartók  
in 1937 with one of his  
natural heirs, Wolfgang  
Rihm. Conflicts and  
musical fracturing  
abound in a satisfyingly  
challenging disc and  
one which boasts totally  
committed performances  
from its musicians.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 68**



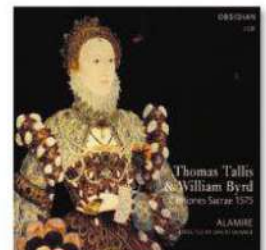
**SAINT-SAËNS**  
Music for Wind Instruments  
Canada's National Arts  
Centre Wind Quintet;  
Stéphane Lemelin *pf*  
Naxos  
What was Saint-Saëns's  
state of mind during the  
last year of his life? If  
music gives us a way into  
such things, then this is  
as good an indicator as  
any. As with so much of  
this composer's music,  
these works are warm and  
astonishingly melodic. But  
it also seems as though he  
would have moved into  
a new, more economical  
style had he had the time.  
Fine performances.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



**LISZT**  
'New Discoveries, Vol 3'  
Leslie Howard *pf*  
Hyperion  
Leave it to Leslie Howard  
to give us new discoveries  
for Liszt year. This pianist  
and scholar has tirelessly  
devoted much of his life  
to uncovering and  
recording the composer's  
work. So then, Vol 3 of his  
"New Discoveries" series  
for Hyperion. For Liszt  
fans, this will be  
self-recommending.  
For new converts, what  
better time to make  
some new discoveries  
than the composer's  
bicentenary year?

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



**TALLIS. BYRD**  
Cantiones sacrae, 1575  
Alamire / David Skinner  
Obsidian  
Whether or not this is  
the first-ever complete  
recording of the original  
order of the *Cantiones  
sacrae* (our reviewer  
points to an earlier LP  
version), it is an important  
release of hugely  
important music. Given  
that it was responsible  
for bringing an entire  
movement of polyphonic  
music to English society,  
it's amazing how little it  
has been done. This fine  
release should keep us  
going for a while.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**

## Recording of the month



**'ECHOES OF TIME'**  
Shostakovich Violin  
Concerto No 1, etc  
Lisa Batiashvili *vn* Bavarian  
Radio Symphony Orchestra  
/ Esa-Pekka Salonen  
DG  
Shostakovich's First  
Violin Concerto is not a  
work, unlike the *Cantiones  
sacrae* (see above), that  
has had to beg for a  
recording. Most famously  
in recent years, Maxim  
Vengerov and Mstislav  
Rostropovich made a  
celebrated version that  
seems to be wearing less  
well, with critics at any  
rate, as the years go by.

And other fine recent  
accounts have included  
Sarah Chang's and Simon  
Rattle's for EMI.  
So what's special about  
this new one? What  
isn't? Lisa Batiashvili  
announced herself as a  
musician of intelligence  
and refinement when she  
was signed to Sony not so  
long ago. But her move  
across to DG brings with  
it a stunning label debut  
of quite a different order  
of power than anything  
she has given us before.  
A major advantage is  
that she has Esa-Pekka  
Salonen by her side. The

two seem to share similar  
attributes – a cool-headed  
approach that can start  
by sounding a touch  
remote but advances  
step by step until the  
listener finds himself  
at the work's tortured  
heart. By the close of  
the concerto, violinist  
and orchestra seem to  
feel (at any rate certainly  
make the listener feel) the  
composer's anguish. With  
well-chosen fill-ups, this  
whole, unmissable disc  
is Lisa Batiashvili's first  
great recording. More  
to come, one hopes.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



# SOUNDBITES

Gallery View p16 » Interview p19 » Diary p21 » One to Watch p23 » Richard Eyre p25 »  
Philip Kennicott p26 » The Trial p28 » Biography of an Instrument p30 » Quiz p31

## Riccardo Chailly renews his Decca contract

**T**he celebrated Italian conductor Riccardo Chailly has re-signed

his contract with Decca, making him one of the longest-serving exclusive artists recording today: 28 years since his first disc for the label. The day after a sensational concert at the Barbican with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra – which garnered some of the most ecstatic reviews seen in the London press for a long time – Chailly joined Decca general manager Paul Moseley to renew his association with the label.

Among the projects promised – all with the Gewandhaus Orchestra, of which Chailly



Paul Moseley and a newly re-signed Riccardo Chailly

has been Kapellmeister since 2005 – are a disc of Hindemith's *Konzertmusik*, Verdi's Requiem and a new cycle of the Brahms symphonies. First up, though, is a cycle of the nine Beethoven symphonies, which is

scheduled for release next autumn ahead of live cycles at the Barbican and in Paris, Vienna and Leipzig.

"Maestro Chailly has been an important part of the Decca family for a very long time but renewing with him is genuinely rejuvenating for all of us," said Moseley. "Every project he takes on is re-conceived from first principles and his partnership with the great Leipzig orchestra is recognised worldwide as simply electrifying. We can't wait for his Beethoven cycle and realising our other new plans together."

Riccardo Chailly has won many *Gramophone* Awards including, most recently, the 2007 Recording of the Year for his set of Brahms's two piano concertos with Nelson Frieze. He was named Artist of the Year in 1997.

## OAE launches own label

**T**he Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment is cementing its position as one of the UK's leading ensembles by launching its own label in association with Signum Classics. Under the banner "not all orchestras are the same", OAE Released will reflect the orchestra's "independent, pioneering ethos" as a self-governing group with no single artistic director.

"We felt the name OAE Released was meaningful on many levels – with this new label we're being released into the worldwide marketplace so that people from Hong Kong to Los Angeles can listen to our unique music-making, and it also reflects the OAE's freedom of approach," said William Norris, communications director. First to be issued in February will be

Monteverdi's *Vespers* with the Choir of the Enlightenment under Robert Howarth. Following this in the autumn will be an archive recording of Sir Charles Mackerras conducting Beethoven's Symphony No 9 at the Edinburgh Festival in 1994, and in December the label will release a live recording from January 2011 of Vladimir Jurowski conducting a programme of Wagner, Mahler and Liszt with mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly.

Recordings will be available on CD and as downloads from iTunes, eMusic, Naxos, Amazon, eClassical and the OAE's website.



The BBC Singers appointed **Paul Brough** to the role of principal guest conductor in January. He joins chief conductor David Hill, conductor laureate Stephen Cleobury, and current principal guest conductor Bob Chilcott, with whom he shares his position. Brough is director of music at All Saints Margaret Street, London.



Classical music names in the 2011 New Year Honours list were led by English National Opera chairman **Vernon Ellis** and mezzo-soprano Felicity Palmer. Ellis, who was knighted, is also chairman of the Classical Opera Company, while Palmer was made a Dame following her CBE award in 1993.



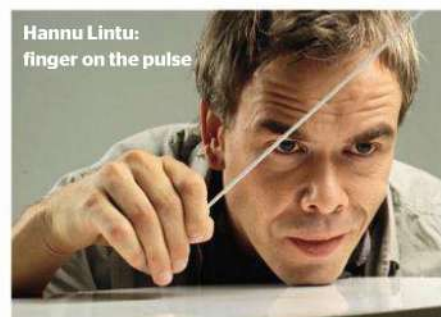
## Hannu Lintu joins Finnish Radio Symphony

**T**he Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra has appointed a new chief conductor – Hannu Lintu.

Lintu, currently artistic director and chief conductor of the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra, will take up the role from the 2013/14 season, though he will serve as principal guest conductor for the season beforehand. The contract is for three years, with an optional two-year extension.

He succeeds Sakari Oramo, whose contract comes to an end in spring 2012 but who will continue his conducting relationship with the orchestra.

“Though the FRSO will be sharpening its profile even further on the international circuit, its core mission is to carry out the Finnish Broadcasting Company’s role of safeguarding Finnish culture,” said Lintu. “It is the FRSO’s job to be innovative and to keep its finger on the pulse of the times.”



Hannu Lintu:  
finger on the pulse

## TAKING NOTE WHAT THE PAPERS SAY...

### *The Daily Telegraph*

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies has made a scathing attack on “too many” conductors “churning out production-line performances”. The composer claims he only began conducting himself because “lazy and

limited” conductors found his compositions too challenging. No names were mentioned but he implicated some well-known peers: “I had furious rows with some of them. Some of them are very well known. They wanted to keep their world safe, but music is not safe and nor should it be.” Spared from criticism were “real masters” Sir Simon

Rattle and Pierre Boulez.  
[www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)

### *BBC News*

A House of Commons motion to allow musicians to carry instruments on planes has been rejected by the House of Lords. “If airlines want to acquire a bad reputation with musicians then they can do so at their

own risk,” said Conservative Earl Attlee. “A difficulty is, if we regulated, we would get the lowest common denominator and it might discourage the industry from coming up with an innovative solution.”  
[www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news)



**The Sixteen** and the Genesis Foundation have joined forces to launch Genesis Sixteen, the UK’s first programme for singers aged 18 to 23 providing specific training for professional choral and consort work. The scheme includes four courses each year led by Harry Christophers and members of The Sixteen.



Former BBC Scottish Symphony chief conductor **Ilan Volkov** has been appointed music director of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra for three years. His contract begins next season – the orchestra’s first in the newly built Harpa concert hall. Volkov will conduct six weeks of concerts in his first season and nine weeks in the subsequent two.



## GRAMOPHONE TALKS TO...

## Lisa Batiashvili

The Georgian violinist on her Shostakovich DG debut

**Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto is as popular as it's ever been just now – we've recently seen a number of recordings.**

There are many things very attractive about it. I heard it first in a recording by David Oistrakh, which impressed me very much and told me a story of that Soviet time that somehow I also experienced in my childhood. But today I see very young people playing it. It has so many facets, such depth and at the same time incredible virtuosity, so you can, somewhat ironically, have a fantastic time playing it.

**Has the Oistrakh recording you heard guided your own interpretation?**

Oistrakh himself has. He worked together with Shostakovich on this piece. And I went through it with Mark Lubotsky, who was Oistrakh’s student. I hardly played it for him, we just sat and talked about it and he would play passages to me to give me an idea of the reason why a particular passage is there. Working with him, experiencing that direct line to Oistrakh and through him to Shostakovich, has been a revelation.

**Compare the moods of all the movements.**

The first is like a mirror of a kind of senseless life, with the violin looking for the melody, and it’s so disorientating. Then comes typical Shostakovich sarcasm in the second



movement, when he describes the ugliness of that time while being fun and ironic. The third brings real desperation with a cadenza full of human despair. Then, by the fourth, everything is burning and out of control: it’s like dancing in hell – we’re not in our life anymore. That’s what Lubotsky told me...

**...The grotesquerie of much Russian art?**

Yes. But the regime said everything was nice and you weren’t allowed to be unhappy! That was the true grotesquerie. People couldn’t express that in words.

**‘Echoes of Time’ is reviewed on page 66**



## GALLERY VIEW



# Meet the Graingers

He may have been unorthodox - he once wrote to his mother, "I hardly ever think of ought else but sex, race, athletics, speech and art" - but, save for the nude painting in the background, there is little to suggest Percy Grainger's bizarre outlook on life in this wedding portrait from September 1928. Pictured with wife Ella Grainger (née Ström) in the couple's home in White Plains, New York, Grainger had the photograph taken by Frederick Morse, his friend and secretary.

For the wedding itself, which took place a month earlier onstage at the Hollywood Bowl, Grainger conducted a premiere of his work *To a Nordic Princess (Bridal Song)*.

Australian-born Grainger's compositional output is extensive, comprising both original compositions and folk-music settings. Both are celebrated at Kings Place from February 17 to 20 in a special event to coincide with the 50th anniversary of his death. More than 120 works will be performed, ranging from

songs to wind-band repertoire. There is also a choral workshop and a fascinating event, "Experimenting with Grainger", which focuses on one of his experimental machines, the Electric-Eye Tone-Tool. The event ends with a seminar at the British Library, introduced by the festival's artistic director, Penelope Thwaites, who believes that, 50 years after his death, Grainger "is emerging as one of the most revolutionary cultural figures of the 20th century".



Resonus Classics, the world's first solely digital label, will launch on March 28. Founded by Adam Binks and Jonathan Manners, the label will issue up to 10 recordings a year as MP3, ACC, FLAC and WAV files. First to be released in March is the world-premiere recording of Mendelssohn's 1825 version of the Octet, featuring the **Eroica Quartet**.



Also in March, New York's Orchestra of St Luke's will open the new **DiMenna Center for Classical Music**. At a cost of \$37m, the "acoustically optimised" facility will be the orchestra's first permanent home, used for rehearsal, recording and education programmes.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GRAINGER MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE; JACK LIEBECK; JIM BROWN; MARK LYONS; KEVIN WESTENBERG



## The Specialist Classical Chart

The UK's best-selling pure classical releases

**OFFICIAL**  
charts company

Compiled in association with the BPI,  
by The Official Charts Company

- 1 (1) **Forever Vienna**  
André Rieu *Decca*
- 2 (2) **Voices - Chant from Avignon**  
Benedictine Nuns of Notre Dame *Decca*
- 3 (3) **The 50 Greatest Pieces of Classical Music** LPO/David Parry *X5*
- 4 (4) **Sospiri**  
Cecilia Bartoli *Decca*
- 5 (11) **Officium Novum**  
Jan Garbarek; Hilliard Ensemble *ECM*
- 6 (5) **Rossini - Stabat mater**  
Santa Cecilia Orch / Pappano *EMI*
- 7 (7) **Tchaikovsky. Bruch - Violin Concertos** Nicola Benedetti *DG*
- 8 (6) **Whitacre - Light & Gold**  
Eric Whitacre Singers; Laudibus *Decca*
- 9 (12) **Italian Concertos**  
Alison Balsom; Scottish Ensemble *EMI*
- 10 (9) **Shostakovich - Symphony No 10**  
RLPO / Vasily Petrenko *Naxos*



Chart for week ending January 8, 2011  
(previous week's position in brackets).

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## GRAMOPHONE TALKS TO...

# Lawrence Power

The British viola player on completing his Hindemith series for Hyperion with the viola concertos

### This is the third and final volume in your Hindemith series.

To record over three years every note that Hindemith wrote for the viola has been a treat and a challenge. I grew up playing Hindemith and essentially I just think he's a fantastic composer. I find a lot of humour and character in his music, and he combines rhythm and harmony in a really fascinating way. Unfortunately, he has an undeserved reputation for being academic and dull but, more than most composers, I think he has suffered from bad performances over the years.

### How did Hindemith's style progress?

It's been interesting to start with the piano-and-violin sonatas and end with the concertos. Hindemith's voice gradually became more unique and, by the concertos, he was pushing the boat out more and more, technically. He had the reputation of being an *enfant terrible* and there are certainly movements in the *Konzertmusik* where he's having a joke with everyone – not least those who have to play it!

### Hindemith was himself a professional viola player. How did that influence his works?

He clearly understood the difficulties of writing for viola and orchestra and, on this disc, with the exception of the *Trauermusik*,



there are no violins – it's a cunning way to bring the viola through the texture better and it brings a particular colour to the music, too.

### Der Schwanendreher is the only work Hindemith labelled a concerto.

It's probably the best-known concerto among viola players – it's the most lyrical of the three and the central movement is a beautiful lullaby. I see it as Hindemith's personal reaction to what was happening in Nazi Germany at the time. It has such a defiant opening and I really enjoy playing it.

Lawrence Power's Hindemith disc is reviewed on page 58

## Consultant role for Renée

Renée Fleming adds another strand to her busy career with her appointment as Lyric Opera of Chicago's first creative consultant. The soprano, who alongside Lyric music director Sir Andrew Davis is also elected to the company's board of directors as vice president, will serve in the role for five years. She will curate a world-premiere

opera in the 2015-16 season, develop an annual American theatre programme beginning with a new production of *Oklahoma!* in 2013, expand Lyric's education and young-professionals initiatives, and continue to appear in Lyric Opera productions.

"Lyric is home to so many talented and dedicated colleagues. I am eager to join forces with them as we work to keep opera relevant and meaningful," she said.

**John Morris Russell** is to become chief conductor of the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra from September 2011, succeeding the late Erich Kunzel. Current music director of the Windsor Symphony Orchestra in Ontario, Russell was associate conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra for 11 years. The Cincinnati Pops was founded in 1977 and has made more than 100 recordings.



London's Wigmore Hall and New York's Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center will form a new "cross-Atlantic partnership" from November 2011. The first residency will feature CMS artistic directors, cellist **David Finckel** and pianist Wu Han, alongside CMS artists in three evening recitals over a week-long period in London.





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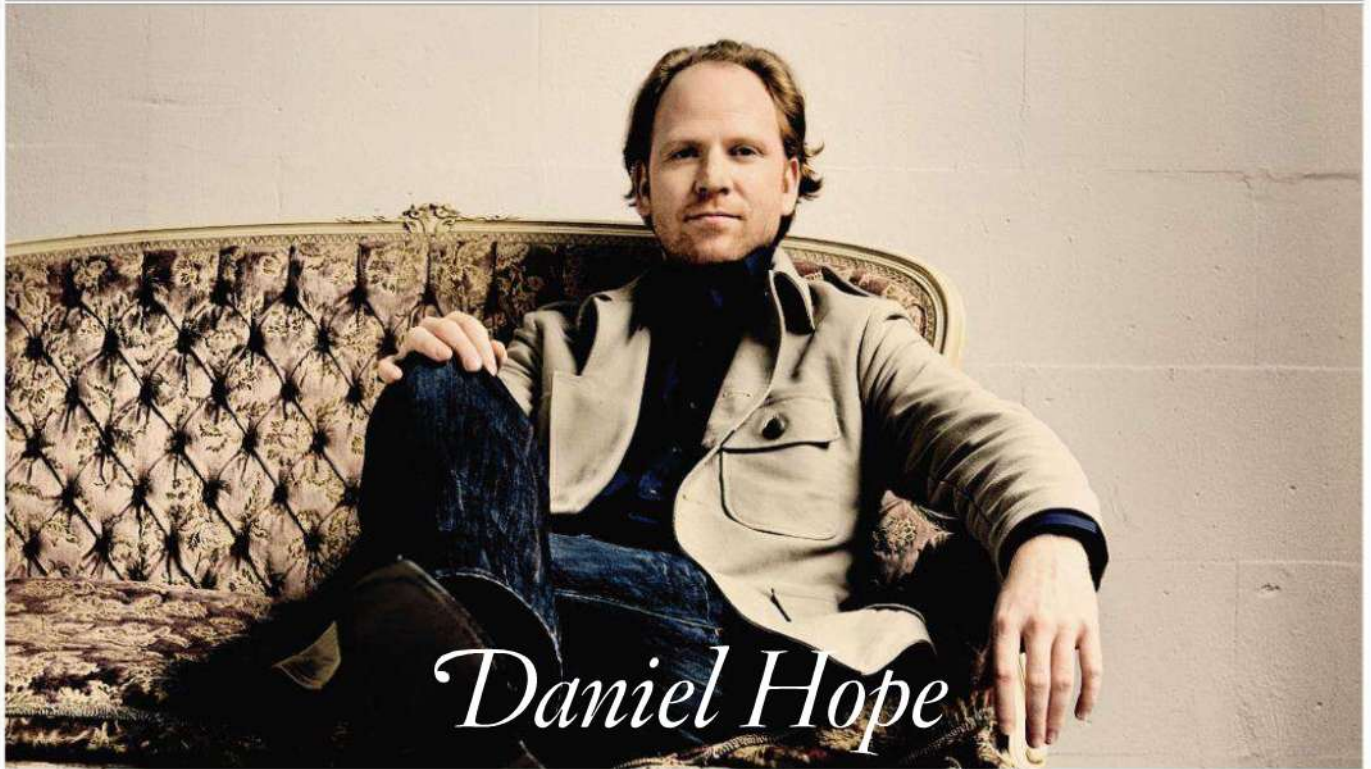
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A CONVERSATION WITH...



# Daniel Hope

**Anastasia Tsioulcas** defies a snowstorm in New York to quiz the violinist on his new album, *'The Romantic Violinist'*, which pays tribute to Joseph Joachim

**G**ramophone's chat with British violinist Daniel Hope seems utterly damned by the weather gods. A few weeks ago a scheduled in-person talk with the musician had to be cancelled due to a winter storm in London; now a massive storm has buried the New York City area in a foot and a half of snowfall.

With that, I abandon hopes of meeting Hope in person at Carnegie Hall, where he is currently rehearsing with the youthful New York String Orchestra, a midwinter training camp for young musicians founded by Alexander Schneider and for the past 15-plus years led by Hope's longtime friend Jaime Laredo. But the brilliant and fiercely intelligent violinist affably agrees to a hastily rearranged conversation that takes place by phone instead to discuss his newest project, *"The Romantic Violinist"*, in which he pays tribute to the legendary Joseph Joachim and to Joachim's circle, which included Brahms, Bruch, the Schumanns and Dvořák.

"Starting out with this, I only knew Joachim as the one who edited the Brahms Violin Concerto," says Hope. "But in starting to read about him, I was amazed by his influence on artistic life in general in the 19th century. He rediscovered the Beethoven Violin Concerto for us," Hope enumerates. "He forged relationships between composers; he forcibly introduced Brahms to Robert and Clara Schumann. He advised Dvořák. And of course he was a composer as well; I didn't really know his music apart from the 'Hungarian' Concerto, and so it was very interesting to me to learn about how he became a disciple of Liszt, and then broke with him totally."

In certain ways, Hope says, Joachim and other artists of his time present a model for life as a multi-skilled, thoroughly 21st-century musician such as himself. "In those days," Hope explains, "it was

totally normal to take on all sorts of different roles and responsibilities. Mendelssohn, for example, was a presenter; he raised money and he organised festivals. At some point we got away from that multifaceted musical education and got enmeshed in the star culture that was so central in the 20th century. But Joachim and others were great helpers in spreading the musical word – back then it was a necessity to be a guiding force as well as a player."

"Guiding force" would be as good a description as any for Hope's work, which extends past the solo artist's traditional touring/recording circuit to encompass his roles as an author (with two best-sellers published in Germany and a third book on the way), a broadcaster and a live presenter who serves as artistic partner in Germany's Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival and as associate artistic director of the Savannah Music Festival in Georgia.

Perhaps an even better description for Hope's work is to call it story-telling. "I think of my albums as much larger musical projects," he says. "As ever for me, it's not just recording a CD, it's a multi-year project. It's not just putting pieces together but looking for stories that have some kind of narrative thread, either political or historical. That's what makes me tick," he explains. "My last recording, 'Air', was about exploring the Baroque; *'The Romantic Violinist'* is a way of examining Romantic music more broadly."

Behind it all is the violinist's voracious love of music. "I wanted to play the violin and was lucky enough to be able to do so from early on," he reflects. "But playing wasn't enough for me. I had a much more all-consuming obsession with music. Ninety-nine per cent of what I do, whether it's writing or presenting or commissioning music – it's a constant search for music, a constant addiction." ●

*"The Romantic Violinist"* is released by Deutsche Grammophon on March 1



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## DIARY

# Harrison Birtwistle

The composer looks forward to a new recording of his orchestral works on the NMC label

**T**his May NMC is releasing a CD of three of my works – *The Shadow of Night*, *Night's Black Bird* and *The Cry of Anubis*. They're all premiere recordings, despite the fact that I wrote them some time ago. *The Cry of Anubis* dates from 1994 – why it's taken this long to record I have no idea. Does anybody record music anymore? It's not like it used to be.

I haven't had much to do with the recording itself. It took place in July last year in Manchester with the Hallé and, although I haven't heard them perform in years, I believe they're a wonderful orchestra. But I can explain how these pieces came about.

**When I wrote *The Cry of Anubis***, I was composer-in-residence with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. I had to "justify" the title I'd been given, as it were, so I suggested a series of five pieces for the principals of the orchestra – and *The Cry of Anubis* was the first and the last one! I've always had a lot of favour with the tuba – it has hidden qualities. With the whole question of recognising the vocal qualities of an instrument, what comes to mind is Mozart and the lyrical potential he found in the bassoon with his Bassoon Concerto. It was quite an extraordinary achievement, particularly for such a young man. The slow movement is surely one of the great alto arias of Mozart. And



**'I compose all the time. Even when I don't have a pencil in my hand'**

then there's Beethoven. I was listening some time ago to his Fourth Symphony and he, too, recognises a quality in the bassoon that didn't exist before. Likewise, the tuba has always had – and don't ask me to justify it – these qualities that could be exploited. Not only that, shortly before *The Cry of Anubis*, I wrote an opera, *The Second Mrs Kong*, in which Anubis – the jackal-headed god of the necropolis in Egyptian mythology – was a significant character. I used the tuba to emblemise that character. I'm pleased Owen Slade is playing on this recording as he gave the world premiere performance back in 1995.

**The other two works**, *The Shadow of Night* and *Night's*

*Black Bird*, belong together. They share a unique element, if I can say that, in that they both start from the same place and end in the same place, although their internal journeys are different. I wrote *The Shadow of Night* in 2001 – a commission from the Cleveland Orchestra. The title comes from a dark poem by George Chapman (1559-1634). As you read it, you get the general order of this feeling of melancholy, an expression of the qualities of the night. I also took inspiration from John Dowland's lute song "In darkness let me dwell". The three-note motif that opens Dowland's work – a gesture that goes up a semitone and back again – permeates both *The Shadow of Night* and *Night's Black Bird*.

**In the process of composition**, at any point there are many directions you can go. It's not about rejection – any direction is as good as any other direction, it's what you do with that direction that matters. With *The Shadow of Night* and *Night's Black Bird*, I thought it would be an interesting idea to create the same substratum, the same soil, for both – but in certain aspects they take different pathways through this shared terrain. There's another analogy, too, in that Dowland set the *Lachrymae* seven times – his settings have the same harmony but the figuration and the direction of the inner parts is different in each piece.

**I compose all the time. Even when I don't have a pencil in my hand**, I'm still composing. There are no rules – I have a studio at the bottom of my garden and, depending on how it's going, I'll stay there for hours, sometimes forgetting to eat and drink. You can't be self-conscious – you can't say, "I'm going to strive to surprise the listener all the time", because that doesn't work. At the same time, the element of surprise is the difference between greatness and mundanity. In the case of Beethoven, he is the master at never doing what you think he's going to do. On the other hand, I listened to a piece by Spohr the other day and it was totally predictable – like that wood stain you can buy that does exactly what it says on the tin! © Harrison Birtwistle's NMC recording will be issued in May



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## ONE TO WATCH



# Charlie Siem

Armed with a new recording contract, the violinist is set to make an impact

**C**harlie Siem is the very model of a modern violin virtuoso. In fact, “model” is an entirely appropriate word: alongside a hectic international touring schedule and an album out this month under a new contract with Warner Classics, he still finds time to appear in Italian *Men’s Vogue* in a photo shoot with “the groover from Vancouver”, Bryan Adams. His celebrity chums also include photographer Mario Testino, who avers that Siem’s “contemporary look mixed with his mastering of the violin...bring a freshness into the world of classical music”.

Of course, the suits and the shoots are only the icing on the cake. Underneath lies a serious musician, half-Norwegian, half-British, educated at Eton and Cambridge, a pupil of Itzhak Rashkovsky and Shlomo Mintz and now linked with a 1735 Guarneri del Gesù fiddle once much loved by Menuhin. Siem hit the record racks in 2008 with a disc of Elgar’s *Sonata* coupled with music by Grieg and he has since performed throughout the world. In 2009 he accompanied the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden and in Cuba, Germany and Denmark.

The new disc grew from that dance collaboration. Choreographer Johan Kobborg’s ballet was inspired by the “encore” pieces of Itzhak Perlman and he recruited Siem to play virtuoso works by Bazzini and Wieniawski. There’s also music by Kreisler, Paganini, Waxman and Sarasate and a bonus in Heifetz’s arrangement of *Estrellita*. With more world travel planned, it will make an ideal calling-card. 🎻

**Name** Charlie Siem

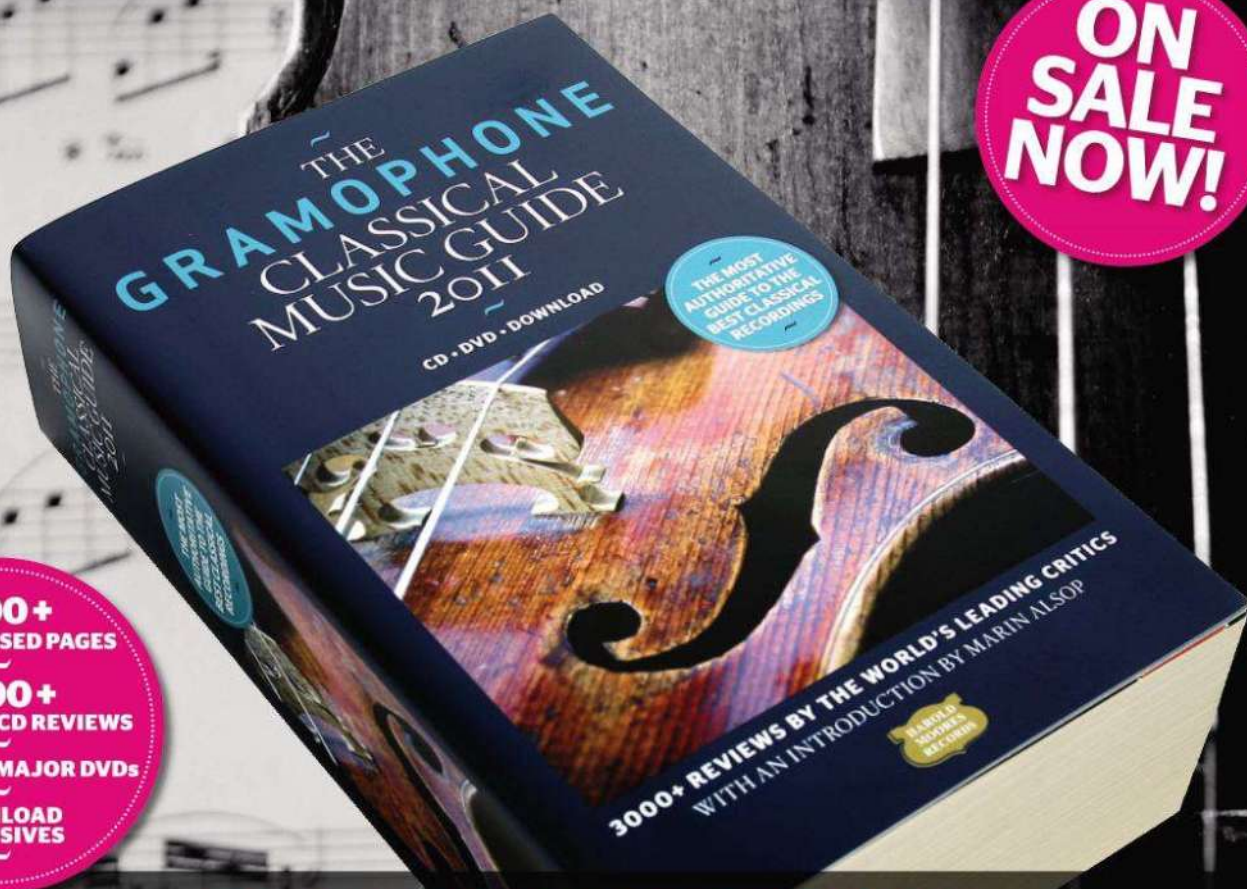
**Age** 25

**Plans** Debut with the European Union Chamber Orchestra in Bristol (March 10), recitals in Chicago and Utah, recording a second album for Warner Classics with the London Symphony Orchestra



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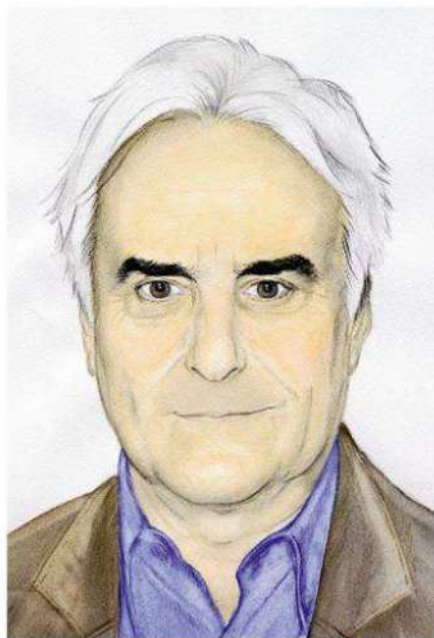
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# Richard Eyre

On the parallels between theatre director and conductor



People often ask me what a director does in the theatre. It's not a naive question and it's not paranoia – or at least not only paranoia – that makes me avoid answering this question. Directing is a matter of understanding the meaning of a scene – and for that matter a play – and staging it in the light of that knowledge. It's your choice of actions and adverbs that constitute the craft of directing. By which I mean: get up from that chair and walk across the room...slowly. Or quickly. Or brightly. And so on. Add to this the nouns, "detail" and "patience"; and the maxim, "Always remember tomorrow is not the first night," and you have said more or less all that can be said of the craft of directing in the theatre. Of course all this has to be underwritten by a clear view of what the play is trying to say and why. And the "why" is as important as the "what". By making choices about casting, design, costume and performances, it's impossible not to be taking a view about how people live, how they behave and how they are influenced. A production starts its existence as a tone of voice and of colour – at the beginning it has a shape as formless as a shadow on a sheet on a washing line – but by reading the play repeatedly and discussing it with the designer and then illustrating it, it starts to come off the page and acquire a clear physical shape.

A director tries to ensure that the play will come alive in performance. Spontaneity – or the appearance of spontaneity – is everything and to get there you have to go on a methodical, prolonged and uncertain journey, sometimes through weeks of rehearsals. A rehearsal is an exploration – the writer provides the territory and the director draws the map as the journey progresses.

A rehearsal is a time when actors experiment, invent, explore, discuss, dispute, practise and play and it's the job of a director to create a world – private and secure – where this activity can go on without fear of failure. There is no method that guarantees a good rehearsal and it's as hard to know why some highly articulate, learned and intelligent directors seem unable to animate a cast of actors as it is to understand how the same orchestra can be inspired by some conductors and seem commonplace in the hands of others.

I've recently had the opportunity of watching two conductors at work at first hand: Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Ed Gardner. They

both conducted my production of *Carmen* at the Metropolitan Opera – Yannick at its premiere last December and Ed recently in a revival. It was the Met debut for both of these strikingly young (mid-30s) and strikingly good conductors, who were also strikingly good collaborators. Of course the music reigned supreme, but we sat side by side in the rehearsal room and shared views on performance, tempi, staging and motivation without demarcation.

Then the partnership changed. The orchestra arrived, the conductor stepped on to the podium and, while it wasn't the end of the collaboration, it was an end to discussion. I'm fascinated by the first encounter of an

orchestra and conductor. There's rarely a word from the conductor – no "I see this piece as X or Y or Z" – merely a greeting, a slightly nervous smile (not always reciprocated), the necessary instruction about where to start from in the score, an upbeat and then they're off. In this case they weren't on autopilot, even though they'd played *Carmen* hundreds of times; they were playing expressively, they were following the conductor; they trusted him.

The means by which this is achieved is somewhere between telepathy, osmosis and semaphore. Both conductors were clear and vigorous with their batons. Ed occasionally made a gesture to one section like sprinkling salt into soup; Yannick sometimes turned his hand as if opening a door with a long doorknob. There were no theatrical gestures, no self-regard, no narcissism. They endorsed the musicians' skill, showed pleasure in their playing – glee from Yannick, joy from Ed – and, without verbal instruction or comment, after their

'Ed Gardner occasionally made a gesture to one section like sprinkling salt into soup'

first encounter with the orchestra they had not only communicated their intentions but more importantly the orchestra had discerned that they had intentions and that they had the knowledge and technical capacity in their hands, eyes and body to

communicate that knowledge. Conductors don't control an orchestra; they create the conditions in which it can function, in which the whole can become greater than the sum of the parts.

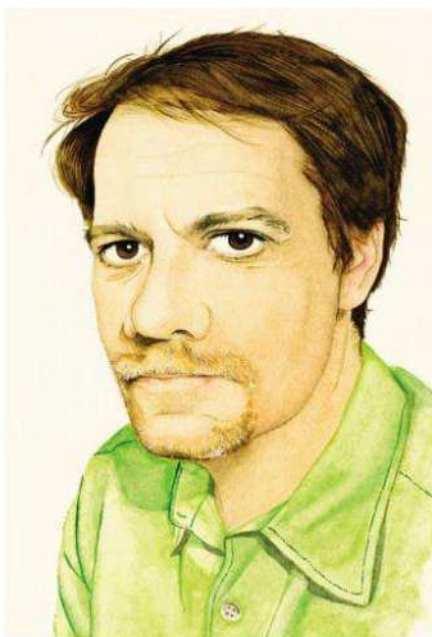
Shortly before the first dress rehearsal of *Carmen* a member of the (excellent) Met chorus said to me: "We've enjoyed working with you." I simpered gratefully. "We give directors about two minutes to see if they know what they're doing."

Two minutes? I think orchestras give conductors about two bars. ●



# Philip Kennicott

Why opera on DVD can be a mixed blessing



**‘The directors have sucked the seria out of Halévy’s opera semiseria’**

Ever since Decca first started letting people know it was forthcoming, I’ve been anxious to lay hands on Cecilia Bartoli’s new DVD of Halévy’s *Clari*. It was advertised on her recent “Sospiri” collection, a greatest hits album that tends to accentuate the lyrical and melodic loveliness of Bartoli’s voice at the expense of the pyrotechnical pizzazz. But what would Halévy’s *Clari* be like? As someone who adores *La Juive*, despite never having heard a really adequate recording of it – a live version from 1973 with Richard Tucker is horribly cut, though hints at the overwhelming power of the work – I was eager to hear more.

But alas, grand disappointment. Debuted in 1828, seven years before *La Juive*, *Clari* is not Halévy in his French Grand Opera mode, but instead channels the Italian style of Rossini. I still hear Halévy’s imprint on the music, on the melodic line and the harmonic language, but overall this is about vocal display, fast tempi and all-too-generic *bel canto* melodic liquidity. The musical interest is mostly on the surface.

The grand integration of drama, orchestra and vocal line which Wagner believed he invented in the name of German art, but which was in fact fully embodied in the best operas of Meyerbeer and Halévy, isn’t obvious in Halévy’s early Italian *opera semiseria*.

I can’t blame my disappointment on Bartoli, who sings gorgeously. And the production, by Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier, is at least visually alluring. But I was hoping for something that would extend and amplify my pleasure in *La Juive*, rather than another opera that extends Bartoli’s admirable infatuation with the career and legacy of Maria Malibran, who created the opera’s title-role at its premiere.

There’s something about DVDs, it seems, that accentuates things like artistic motivation. If Bartoli had recorded *Clari* in the studio, we’d have a recording that was obviously driven by her interest in the music and one might take it down from time to time and skip around to the good bits. But on DVD she becomes even more the centre of the show. It feels like a Bartoli vehicle, not an addition to the Halévy catalogue.

DVDs also accentuate opera’s collaborative elements. Leiser and Caurier’s production, staged at Zurich Opera in 2008, is professional and slick, with video to tell the back story of this young girl who leaves her family and shacks up with a sleazy Duke in hope of a marriage that will bring wealth and wild nights of love. It’s melodramatic and naive and the producers respond by creating a polished cartoon of

it. But I’d rather hear Bartoli sing her first Act 1 exchange with the Duke than watch the directors’ staging of it. Melodrama is built over huge chasms of danger and the wry comic treatment of this moment – in which *Clari*’s whole life may hang in the balance – makes light of the risks she’s running. Halévy’s music here, in one of the occasional passages that suggests his real talent, tells the listener how crucial the moment is. There are times in real life when a single word can undo hopes and squander the fragile reserves of affection.

The directors have tried to salvage a meaningful dramatic work at the expense of history, which tells us that *Clari* is a very stupid girl indeed. By pretending that this is an opera about modern-day internet romance, the directors don’t hint at the gold mine of relevance. They merely make its real significance meaningless, sucking all the *seria* out of the *opera semiseria*.

Oh well. DVDs will break your heart that way, by capturing the idle vectors of the opera world but rarely serving the listener’s

interest in the repertoire. The Metropolitan Opera are now releasing a tremendous torrent of live productions on DVD, but they also lard them with footage of the stagehands moving the sets around during scene changes. Massenet’s *Thaïs* (a new version with Renée Fleming is now out) is a fragile dramatic confection; seeing the little men behind the curtain doesn’t help sustain it.

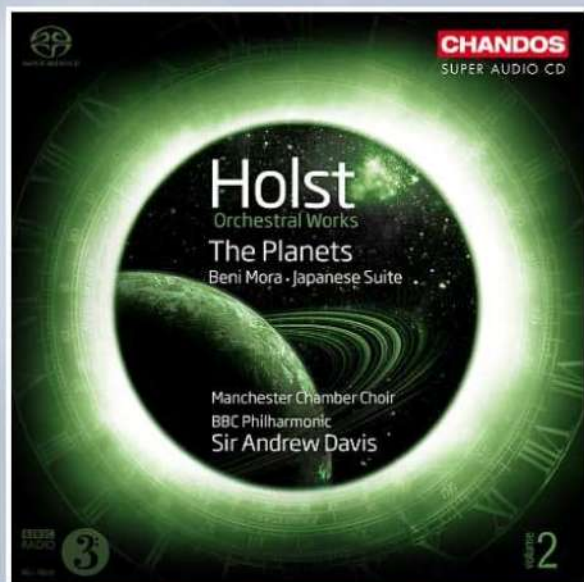
But the new production of *Thaïs* is more about the Met, and the experience of the Met, than it is about *Thaïs*. People will buy *Clari* because they adore Bartoli, just as people will buy the Met’s new DVDs because they want to be fully immersed in the colossus we know as the Metropolitan Opera.

Which makes me pine for the days of the perfectly cast, fully realised, uncut and carefully produced studio recording. DVDs offer us a gold mine of new repertoire, but it comes with a blizzard of distractions: all of the intrusions of live performance, plus the idiosyncrasies of the directors and designers. Not least of these distractions is the vision of the video director, who is often strangely fixated on the comely second oboe player or the insignificant supernumerary.

But what of Halévy? Surely it’s time for a revival. And for more Auber. And there are at least a half dozen Meyerbeer gems awaiting love. It is a strange world we live in, straining with abundance, and yet there’s so much to wish for. ☹







# Disc of the Month

## Holst, Volume 2

Chandos is proud to present the second volume in its series of orchestral works by Holst. The first volume, conducted by the late Richard Hickox, was released to great critical acclaim. On the new disc, Sir Andrew Davis has taken the baton, conducting the BBC Philharmonic in a unique programme: *The Planets*, Holst's orchestral *tour de force*, and two comparative rarities in the concert hall, the *Japanese Suite* and *Beni Mora*.

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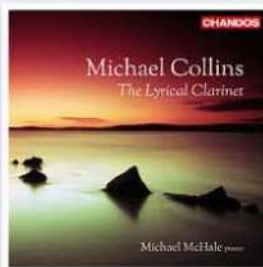
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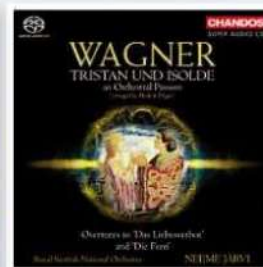
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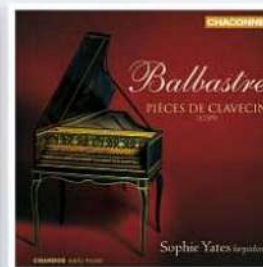


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# THE TRIAL

Iconic recordings reassessed

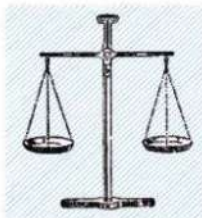


**On trial** this month, **Beethoven's Symphony No 9** performed by the Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler on July 29, 1951

## PROSECUTION: NALEN ANTHONI

'Furtwängler wrenches the pulse at will as he agonises through a long, heaving, sagging sprawl...a travesty of the score'

### *The case against*



We are in hallowed halls. No, not the Old Bailey but Bayreuth's Festspielhaus on July 29, 1951, to listen to the illustrious Wilhelm Furtwängler conduct a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a work that his erstwhile secretary Berta Geissmar said he treated "as a holy ritual". Do a few references to "creator" and "loving father" in the poem

give this secular symphony a sacred slant? Or was there an exaggerated veneration for Schiller's notion of the brotherhood of man? Either way, it was at Beethoven's expense, starting with a disregard for most of his metronome markings.

Beethoven said they were "a welcome means of ensuring the performance of my compositions everywhere in the tempi conceived by me which to my regret have so often been misunderstood". Not only by his contemporaries but by later generations, too. We cite conductor Benjamin Zander: "Romantic interpreters influenced by Wagner and Liszt favoured extremes of tempo and frequent, even violent, fluctuations between those extremes. They tended to equate slow tempi with profundity and significance – thus the slowing up of the 'hammer blows of fate' at the beginning of the Fifth, while at the other extreme Wilhelm Furtwängler propelled the conclusion of the Ninth into a frenzy of religious ecstasy by taking the tempo 70 points faster on the metronome than the one indicated by Beethoven." Furtwängler reputedly distrusted Beethoven's judgement. And wasn't his metronome said to be faulty? Well, in 1967 Peter Stadlen, pianist and music critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, attested to its accuracy.

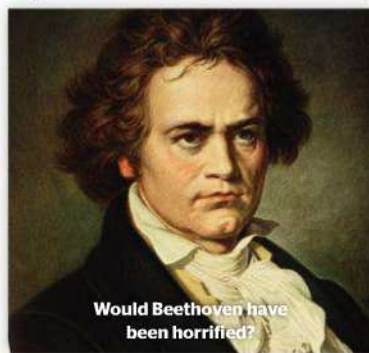
Furtwängler could have done so, too. He didn't, because "he rejected method, metronomic vigour, the weights and measures of musical grocery, to rely on intuition and dream his way through the scores" (Yehudi Menuhin). It was a recipe for impetuosity, or

instability. Neither is present to begin with. Furtwängler opens the first movement at a pulse (or beat) 18 points lower than specified. But he largely sticks to it and does so even when he slows markedly between bars 78 and 91, thus illustrating a fundamental point: the metronome sets tempi but doesn't impose rigidity. Its markings govern pulse, and tempi can either match a pulse or change proportionately within it to meet the expressive needs of music. Which is why Beethoven also advocated *Gefühlstempo* ("tempo of feeling"). Clearly Furtwängler knew the principle; he didn't always follow it. Not when he wanted to aggrandise rhetoric, as in the *Scherzo*. Furtwängler doesn't enter *Molto vivace* as directed. He grandly proclaims the first eight bars before gradually accelerating to the right pace, then tediously stretches the ending of the Trio by slowing down too early.

He stretches the slow movement too. True, Beethoven instructed *Adagio molto e cantabile* ("very slow and songlike") for this set of variations but what about the added markings of 60 to 63 beats per minute? Not *too* slow therefore. Yet Furtwängler starts at about 40 and then wrenches the pulse at will as he agonises through a long, heaving, sagging sprawl replete with disruptive hesitations. Indeed extraordinary conducting,

supremely responsive musicians – but a travesty of the score.

Beethoven is ignored, and again in the choral finale. Furtwängler's "religious ecstasy" is felt fairly soon. Besides, his over-elasticised line and penchant for extreme histrionics distort the movement's tightly organised structure. This is an interpretation of magnified contrasts, from relative sobriety to hysteria. Brotherhood of man? Sanity and consideration might have suggested that so utopian a concept was just feasible. Instead Furtwängler turns the ideal into a ranting, tub-thumping vision of attainable damnation. Herr Beethoven, Herr Schiller: would you gentlemen prefer to take over this prosecution? *Nalen Anthoni is a music critic for Gramophone*



Would Beethoven have been horrified?



**Our review from April 1991**

"I want to say first, and without hesitation, that this is undoubtedly a great performance. In any record of so long and great a work there are bound to be points that a listener would prefer otherwise...and with so personal an artist as Furtwängler the number of such points will be greater than with a more objective conductor. Yet the power of this interpretation is so compelling...that one is made to accept."

(Trevor Harvey)

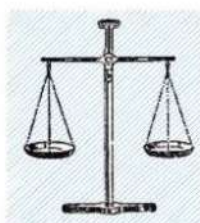
**Beethoven's Symphony No 9** Elisabeth Schwarzkopf *sop* Elisabeth Höngen *contr*

Hans Hopf *ten* Otto Edelmann *bass* Bayreuth Festival Chor and Orch / Wilhelm Furtwängler

EMI © 566901-2

**DEFENCE: ROB COWAN**

'An inspired, fully integrated re-creation of music that too often sounds piecemeal or disjointed'

*The case for*

Try as we may, we cannot undo the evolution of musical interpretation, and the idea of retrospectively "hearing" great works in the way that their first listeners heard them is nonsense. We can't. When Richard Wagner brought the *Choral* Symphony to his festival house at Bayreuth he was acknowledging Beethoven as a prophet, a

forerunner and a musical freedom fighter. You might say that the next step was Wagner's, and that what he took from Beethoven meant that Beethoven himself would henceforth be heard in a quite different light. Enter the mercurial and in some respects demonic figure of Wilhelm Furtwängler, whose visionary interpretative style was inherited in part from Wagner's own.

Reactions to Furtwängler have always been mixed, never more so than today when we fancy ourselves as preachers for the true cause, worshipping at the shrine of historical instrument practice. As my respected colleague reminds me, Beethoven himself welcomed the metronome as a method for ensuring some semblance of tempo correctness. But can we honestly be guided by the interpretative preferences of a man who was by then living largely in the isolation of his musical imagination? Had Beethoven enjoyed the privilege of regular hearing, and had he been in a position to gauge the full acoustical effect of what he was writing, things might have turned out very differently in all sorts of respects.

As to metronomes, Furtwängler had little truck with them. He had his composer's instinct to guide him as well as the Austrian theorist Heinrich Schenker's brand of structural analysis. When Furtwängler opens the Ninth, it becomes a Creation myth, with semiquavers that merge into a primordial rustling and jagged motifs like promontories on a desolate landscape. Would Beethoven have railed about being "misunderstood"? My understanding, or my instinct, tells me that

Maelzel's metronome would have been hurled out of the window. And what of Furtwängler's constant tempo fluctuations? The vital point there is that they are based on sound harmonic instinct, which means that climaxes arrive and explode with elemental inevitability, and structure is never distorted. The climax that erupts at the centre of the first movement is certainly an obvious example but the humbling pedal note at the *Adagio's* cathartic climax is hardly less effective.

As to the finale being "an interpretation of magnified contrasts, from relative sobriety to hysteria", I would proffer the view that it is neither sober nor hysterical but an inspired, fully integrated

re-creation of music that too often sounds piecemeal or disjointed. One or two specific points are worth mentioning. The first concerns the scowling bass-and-cello oration that sets in after the machine-gun opening and the long pause that holds us breathless before the "Ode to Joy" theme enters, ever so quietly, again on lower strings. Has any musical silence ever proved as pregnant with meaning as this? The theme itself builds ecstatically, with inner voices on the strings curling about each other as if caught in a warm embrace. By the time we reach the closing *prestissimo*, the tension has reached

bursting-point. After which the heady onrush of the symphony's closing moments seem as inevitable as the welcoming cheers that greet the winners after a long marathon. Yes, there are other ways of performing the *Choral*, many of them equally defensible, but when great composers give birth to great works, they entrust them to our care, and like any loving foster-parent, that care will inevitably involve a degree of influence. Whether consciously or not, Furtwängler adds Wagner's influence to his own and the result is both profound and life-affirming. ●

Rob Cowan is contributing editor of *Gramophone* and hosts BBC Radio 3's *Breakfast show*



Wilhelm Furtwängler:  
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### BIOGRAPHY OF AN INSTRUMENT



Sir Francis Drake's fabled drum is said to summon his spirit in times of war, finds **Martin Cullingford**

## Drake's Drum

**B**uckland Abbey, half-hidden in low-lying land beside the bleak beauty of Dartmoor, 10 miles inland from the maritime city of Plymouth. Since the 13th century, it was home to Cistercian monks, an order characterised by their reverential atmosphere of silence.

The 16th-century dissolution of the monasteries saw King Henry sell the Abbey to captain and explorer Sir Richard Grenville, who converted it into a home. Yet we're not here to mourn the Reformation's destruction of so much religious heritage but to pay heed to a curiosity among instruments – and, by association, to another knight of the waves, Sir Francis Drake. Circumnavigator of the globe, vanquisher of the Spanish Armada, this is where he lived for 15 years while serving as an MP and mayor of Plymouth. It seems odd to picture the swashbuckling hero among the tranquil lawns and sleepy elegance of Buckland Abbey – less still imagine him as a local legislator – but the visitor today can find here many artefacts which evoke the salt-flecked spirit of the high seas, and none more so than Drake's Drum.

Decorated with his coat of arms, this snare drum travelled the world with Drake, and was still with him when, on his deathbed off the coast of Panama, he ordered its return to England, where it should be beat when his beloved country was in peril, to summon him to her aid once more.

"Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore, / Strike et when your powder's runnin' low; / If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven, / An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed them long ago." So wrote poet Henry Newbolt in the 19th century, words which were set by Stanford in his *Songs of the Sea*.

People claimed to hear the drum sound as the Mayflower left Plymouth for America, when Napoleon was brought into Plymouth as prisoner and when Nelson was made a freeman of the city. A drum roll was heard on HMS *Royal Oak* when the German Navy surrendered in 1918 – the ship was searched twice and no drum found. The snare was heard again as both World Wars began, and during the evacuation of Dunkirk. It was also said to have awoken the Abbey's wardens when the building caught fire in 1938.

Today the drum sits in a glass cabinet, from where any beat might be too muffled to hear. Despite good security and climate-control reasons, an iconic instrument silenced in a case has a sense of pathos. Though, in a way, it is a nice homage to those displaced Cistercian Monks.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES



## QUIZ

# Who am I?

Pit your wits against Gramophone

I worked on a  
US military base



I won many awards during my lifetime, including the Los Angeles Film Critics Award.

I was posthumously awarded the Glenn Gould Prize in recognition of my contribution to music.

I was inspired to compose music after hearing popular French wartime songs. The song "Parlez-moi d'amour" had a particular impact on me.

I worked for a while in the kitchen of an American military base and I was able to use the piano in the dining hall.

When I was not composing music, I wrote a detective novel and I occasionally made

appearances on television as a celebrity chef.

Some works which influenced my music were Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* and John Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*.

One of my most famous works was performed by the New York Philharmonic as part of its 125th anniversary celebration concert.

Before my death, I had planned on writing an opera with a libretto by novelist Barry Gifford. In fact, I was in the process of working on the structure for this when I died.



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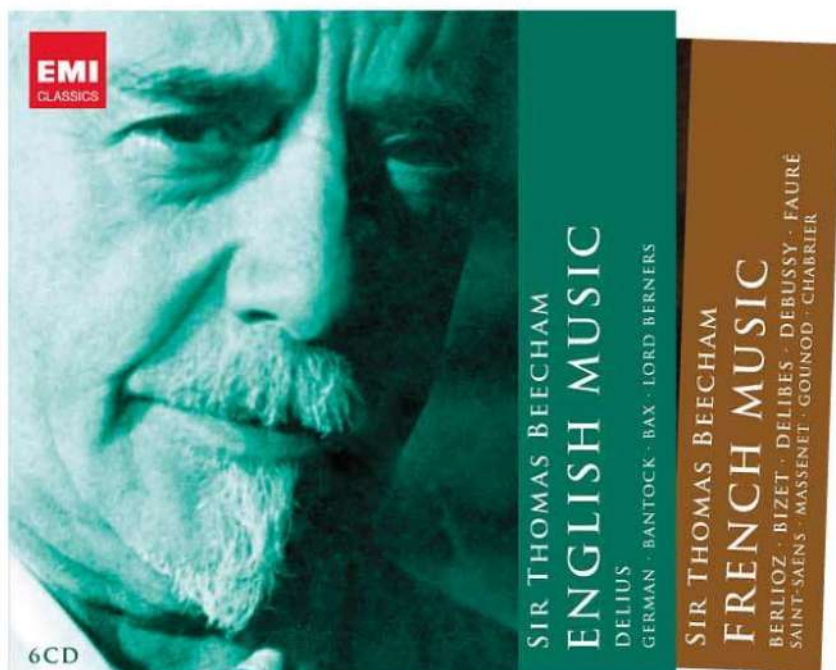


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**- David Cairns**

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# The art of BEECHAM

A reputation for wit can sometimes overshadow  
the serious side of this learned and profound conductor.

We shouldn't let it, says **Rob Cowan**

## The Beecham magic

There's a famous orchestral interlude in the opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet* by Sir Thomas Beecham's great friend Frederick Delius where the star-crossed lovers take themselves off on a hay barge and choose to drown rather than endure more suffering. Before that, they walk to the Paradise Garden, a dilapidated inn, where they dance...and the music seems to reflect both their love and their tragic fate. Given a half-decent performance, it'll render you speechless. But in the hands of Beecham, especially in the context of his recordings of the complete opera, listening means, in all but reality, entering the lovers' world. Why? Because Beecham's belief in and love for the music, his immersion in its potent emotional climate, is so uncompromising that the effect he achieves, both on his players and on us, is like a heady drug. The tiniest detail blossoms while the passion of the moment sweeps you along. But Beecham's method involved something beyond the inspiration of the moment. It's easy to forget that amid the sparkling wit, unpredictability, irascibility and human warmth – all of them fairly familiar Beecham attributes – was an immense learning. During the

last year or so, the broadcaster and former orchestral musician Jon Tolansky chanced upon a recorded promotional talk for *A Village Romeo* that Beecham gave in London before an invited audience. "He goes into a tremendous amount of depth about the entire perspective of the composition," says Tolansky, "not only of *A Village Romeo and Juliet* itself, but about the relationship that Delius had with the entire world of music. Beecham talks – briefly, but to the point – about opera at that time. He talks about Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Hugo Wolf's *Der Corregidor* and Delius's *A Village Romeo* as being the three works that stood completely outside the trends of opera performance, and he paints a portrait of Delius with an enormous amount of musical, musicological and artistic detail. It's a marvellous example of just how much Beecham knew, and that's very important, because his scholarship hasn't always been widely acknowledged. He clearly knew the notes, how they were written, how the compositional structure was built and how the composer actually put his music together; and he also understood, very profoundly and from an artistic and aural perspective, that this opera [which he premiered] was completely in a world of its own."

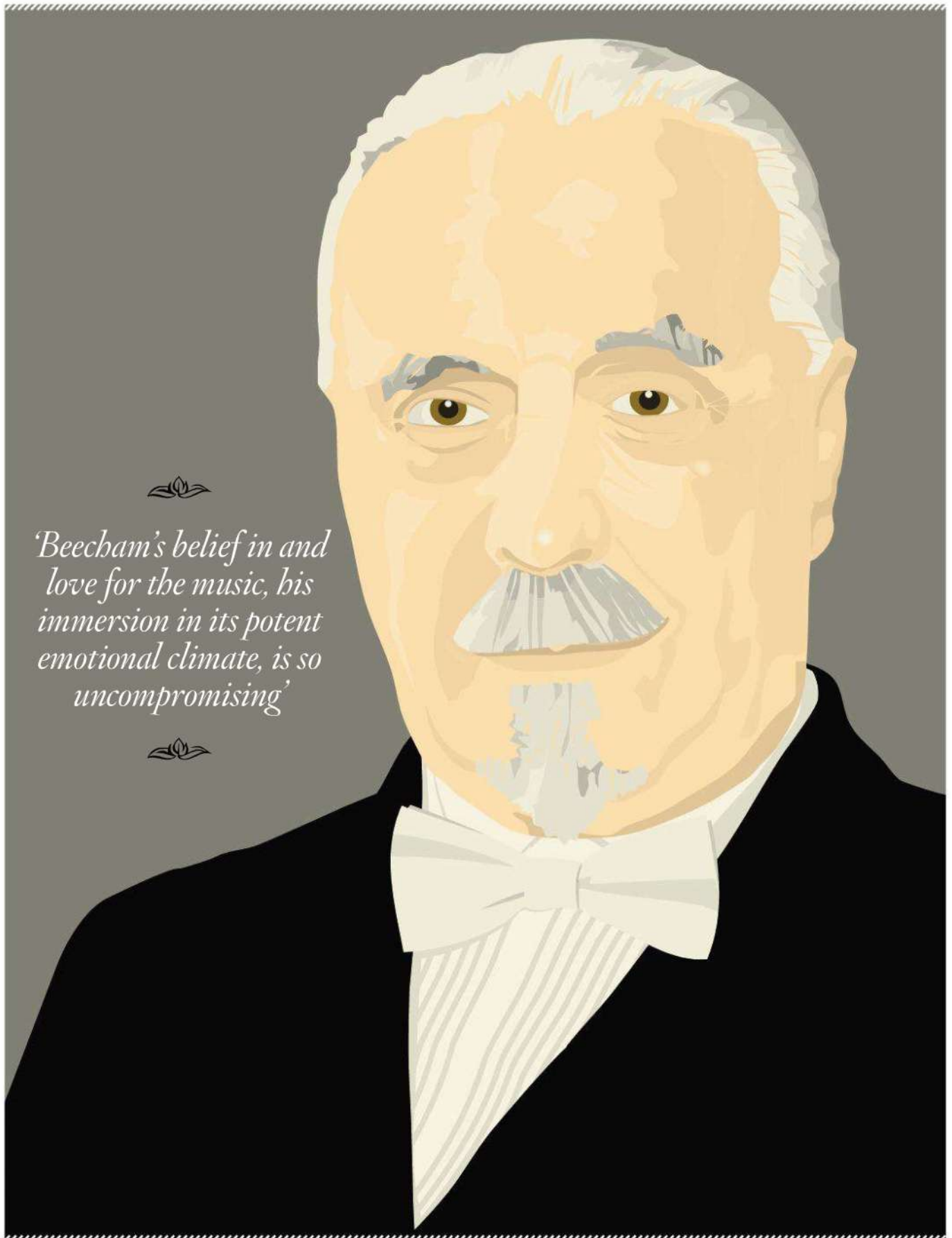
Beecham's dual passions for words and music surfaced during his childhood in St Helens, Lancashire, and his flair for the theatre bore rich fruit in an early association with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and the formation of his own Beecham Opera Company. "He had a remarkable photographic memory," says the writer on music David Cairns. "He used to do extraordinary things with Strauss operas and there are stories about him conducting whole operas without a score quite early. In fact, he conducted so much that some of the time he probably didn't know what he was going to conduct next! You hear of him saying 'It is *Don Giovanni* tonight, isn't it?' The leader's reply would be 'No, Sir Thomas, it's *Figaro*'. Cairns sang in the chorus for the 1951 Covent Garden performance of *Die Meistersinger* and dispels another myth, namely about the "imprecision" of Beecham's baton technique. "Certainly his beat was extremely clear – for the chorus, anyway. He had such a strong sense of rhythm: he projected it with his whole body. I don't think there's ever been a conductor who had a more marvellous feeling for rhythm than Tommy." Denis Vaughan, Beecham's assistant and the founder of the Beecham Choral Society, recalls how "he would use the tip of the baton...he couldn't have got those results otherwise. When he needed precision he got it very easily in that way."



Beecham conducting the RPO at EMI studios  
on his 80th birthday, April 29, 1959

ILLUSTRATION: IAN BILBEY PHOTOGRAPHY: TOPIFOTO





*'Beecham's belief in and  
love for the music, his  
immersion in its potent  
emotional climate, is so  
uncompromising'*



## The gift of the quip

### Some of Beecham's famous bon mots

**"The function of music is to release us from the tyranny of conscious thought."**

To an orchestra member, moments before conducting Richard Strauss's *Elektra*: "The singers think they're going to be heard, and I'm going to make jolly well certain that they're not."

**"The English may not like music, but they absolutely love the noise it makes."**

Spoken into the microphone, having just conducted Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony* for a live radio broadcast: "A city life for me!"

**"While rehearsing a Wagner opera: 'My God! We've been playing for two solid hours and we're playing this bloody tune still!'"**

To an erring musician: "We cannot expect you to be with us all the time, but perhaps you would be good enough to keep in touch now and again."

**To a female cellist: "Madam, you have between your legs an instrument capable of giving pleasure to thousands - and all you can do is scratch it."**

On hearing a rumour that Sir Malcolm Sargent had been kidnapped in China: "I had no idea the Chinese were so musical."

## Playing for Tommy

Beecham nowadays is most readily associated with two orchestras, the pre-war and wartime London Philharmonic, and the post-war Royal Philharmonic, which took around a year or so to settle after its formation in 1946. Regarding the LPO recordings, Vaughan asserts that what most captures his attention "are those things that he always insisted on – the sharpness of the accent and the complete freedom in the commas and the spaces between phrases, so he would do sharp *rallentandos* very, very subtly, making the punctuation so much clearer than usual. For me, the key part of his technique," continues Vaughan, "was the way he really crept inside every phrase – that, and the musical significance of silences, huge silences, and the inflection. His favourite phrase was 'the grand line and flexibility: the grand line is the only thing the public recognises, and the flexibility is the only thing that makes music'. Inflecting within the sound, so that it is constantly growing, and never static – you'll always find that that pertains from gesture." Clarinettist Nick Tschaikow, who played under Beecham in both the London and Royal Philharmonic orchestras,



### Sir Thomas Beecham's life

**Born April 29, 1879** in St Helens, Lancashire. His grandfather was the founder of the Beecham pharmaceutical company.

After Wadham College, Oxford (briefly), he **studies composition** privately with Charles Wood and Moszkowski.

Makes his **professional conducting**

**debut** in 1902, with Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl* at the Shakespeare Theatre, Clapham.

In 1906 becomes conductor of the **New Symphony Orchestra**

In 1909 forms the **Beecham Symphony Orchestra** – members include Albert Sammons, Lionel Tertis and Eric Coates – with which he gives the first complete performances of Delius's *A Mass of Life*.

*"He said he would play an encore, as long as somebody could provide him with a pork pie"*

takes up the theme. "The clarinettist Jack Brymer once said to me, 'Well of course he was wonderful...the thing about conducting is it's the art of gesture'. I thought that was a marvellous phrase on Jack's part, because it does absolutely sum up what the real conductor does." Tschaikow vividly recalls Beecham's rehearsals. "Musically they were a delight. He was familiarising the orchestra with the music while, at the same time, familiarising himself with what his players could do. He would leave some players entirely to their own devices – the bassoonist Gwydion Brooke, for example. 'Gwyd' was a wonderful player but an idiosyncratic musician. When Tommy dealt with him, he wouldn't even try to ask him to do something differently. I remember when we were recording *Sheherazade* [EMI], which Gwyd played in a very idiosyncratic way (people would say 'you can smell the camel dung'), Tommy tried to tone him down a bit. The strange thing was that, for a man who had such a wonderful vocabulary and spoke so well, when he addressed the orchestra he very frequently didn't finish his sentences. He'd say 'Could it be a little more, er...y'know...er, and Gwyd would just play it exactly as he'd played it before!"

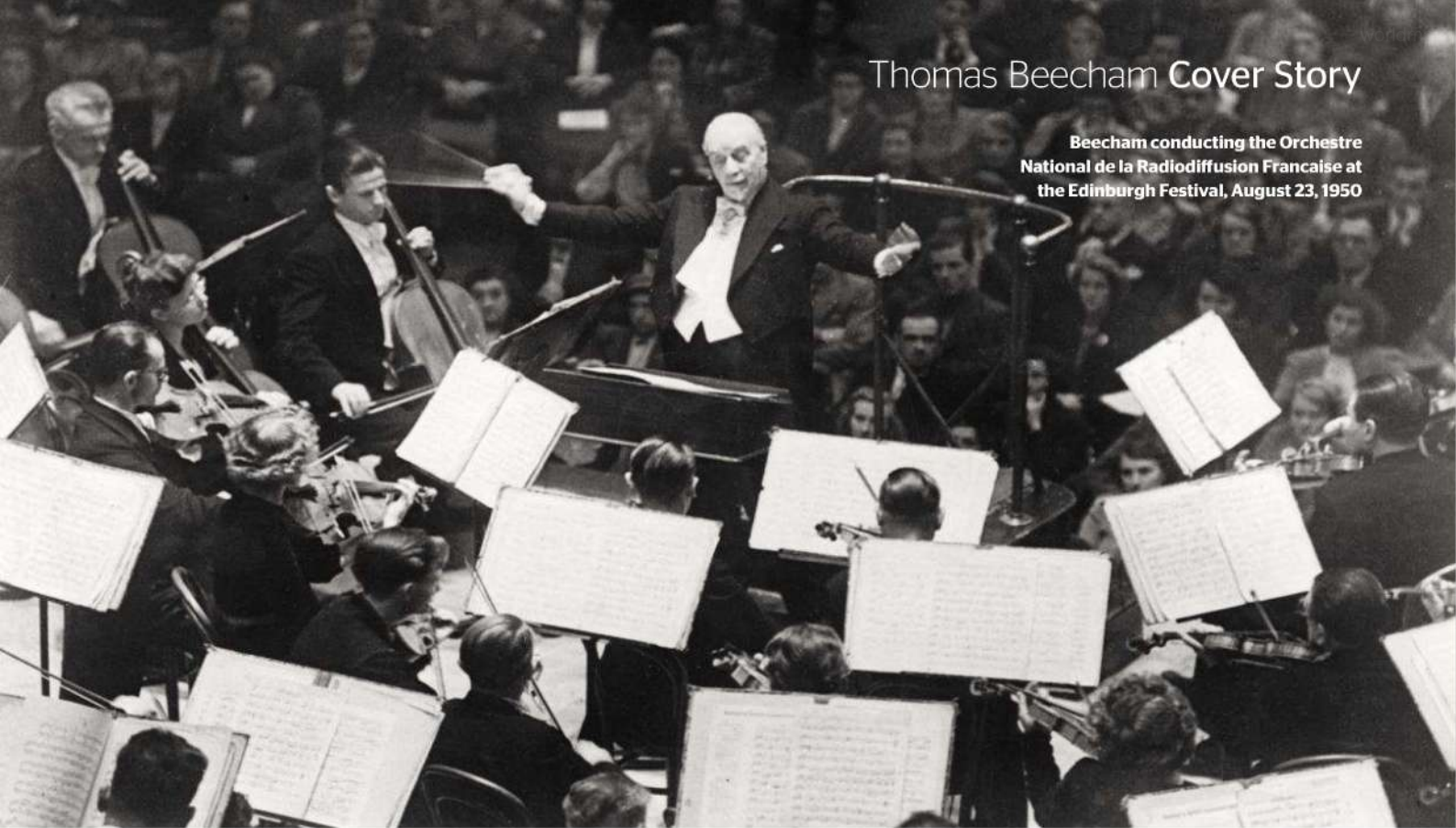
David Cairns recalls Sir Thomas Armstrong, who was principal at the Royal Academy of Music and before that was organist at Christ Church, Oxford, telling a wonderful story about a Royal Philharmonic concert at Oxford's Sheldonian Theatre. "Beecham used to come down to Oxford and give afternoon concerts with morning rehearsals; they'd usually play something that they'd already been performing in London. At the end of this particular rehearsal he said, 'We don't have a symphony, do we?' Someone replied, 'Yes Sir Thomas, we do – it's the Second of Brahms'. Beecham then piped in with, 'Oh well, we all know that!' But a young second violinist, who hadn't been playing in the orchestra for very long, put his hand up and admitted, 'No, Sir Thomas...I've never played it'. Can you imagine that happening in an orchestra under Toscanini or Fritz Reiner? Beecham's response

was instant and delightfully ambiguous. 'My dear fellow,' he said, 'there's no need to worry. I can assure you you'll like it. It's charming.'" Cairns reminds us that Beecham had a rather provocative personality, "and of course he was so different from other maestros of the time. He gave repartee to the audience. You know the singer Thomas Hemsley? Near the close of the Second World War, he heard Beecham in Leicester. At the end of the concert (this must have been with the London Philharmonic), the audience called for an encore. He turned to them and said, yes, he would play an encore, as long as somebody in the audience could provide him with a Melton Mowbray pork pie! As it happened someone could...and two months later, according to Hemsley, Beecham came back, and at the end



# Thomas Beecham Cover Story

Beecham conducting the **Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française** at the **Edinburgh Festival**, August 23, 1950



## Beecham discoveries from the archive

Recordings becoming available for the first time

At a time when hundreds of recordings that had lain for decades in libraries, archives, even cupboards are being hungrily devoured by collectors, what Beecham fare has turned up? Rather a lot, and this year some particular treats are due.

An unusual contribution from EMI is a box-set called "The Great Communicator", featuring interviews about Beecham, and about 10 minutes of the great man himself discussing Delius's *A Village Romeo and Juliet* at a public talk, a recording not generally known to have existed until it was found recently at Abbey Road studios. Alongside that gem are previously unissued rehearsal and performance extracts, including a Berlioz *Grande Messe des morts* from the Royal Albert Hall in 1947.

Pristine Classical has been busy releasing the only recordings from his Seattle period (apparently initiated by Beecham after realising that he wasn't very popular locally and had better show his strengths). Two volumes are out, with the third, Beethoven's Eighth Symphony and assorted showpieces from 1943, expected shortly.

But the greatest fund of Beecham material lately has come from Somm Records' "Beecham Collection". The most recent issue is a BBC *Les Troyens* from 1947 but look out for the release in March of Schubert's Ninth Symphony with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall in December 1955 – the only recording of Sir Thomas conducting the "Great C major".

he just turned round and with his forefinger described a circle". Cairns continues, "You see, it's us, the English – we're disturbed by that sort of behaviour in public figures and think that the reason for Beecham's frivolity is that he's not serious, which is utterly nonsensical. Also, he treated his players much more like human beings than a lot of other conductors did in those days."

## Beecham as colleague and stepfather

It's fairly obvious that Beecham's players adored him. But could they easily socialise with him? Tchaikovsky says that as a rule they couldn't, "although I'd travelled with him in the car and I had a couple of meals in his company. I enjoyed working with Beecham as much as I enjoyed working with anybody but it didn't matter how long you worked with him, you always remained 'Mister [so-and-so]'. Musicians always referred to Beecham as 'Tommy' but you always referred to him as 'Sir Thomas' – if you didn't, you wouldn't have lasted two weeks! You know, he was a little man and was very conscious of the fact. When he was talking to you, you never got within three feet of him, because he didn't like looking up at you. But he was always agreeable and benign – though he hadn't been when he was young. That's so often the case with young conductors. People I'd known who worked with him early on told me that as a young man Beecham had been quite difficult, even tyrannical and rude. But that wasn't how he was when I knew him, although I did once see him kick his way out of St Pancras Town Hall when we were rehearsing and he couldn't get his own way."

Beecham's stepson Sir Jeremy Thomas (by his second wife, pianist Betty Humby) also recalled that he could on occasion be impatient, "though never with me or Mamma. However, I do recall an incident with a telephone operator in an American hotel. 'Uncle Tom' [as

From 1910 for five years holds **London seasons** during which he conducts UK premieres of *Elektra*, *Salome* and *Der Rosenkavalier*; there's also a Mozart opera festival and a visit from the Ballets Russes.

Founds the **Beecham Opera Company** in 1915.

Receives a **knighthood** in 1916 – later that year succeeds to his father's baronetcy.

Financial difficulties find him in the **Court of Chancery** in 1923.

Founds the **London Philharmonic** in 1932; in the same year, becomes artistic

director of **Covent Garden**.

Conductor of **Seattle Symphony Orchestra** (1941-43) and of opera at the **New York Metropolitan Opera** (1942-44).





Taking a break  
during an interval,  
with Lady Beecham

Sir Jeremy called him] hadn't been able to contact someone, and when the telephone operator said 'have a nice day', he replied 'go to hell!'" Sir Jeremy tells a touching story that reflects the man's basic humanity, as well as his willingness to "face the music" in more ways than one. "One thing that always surprised me – and don't forget I was a young boy at the time – was the enormous amount of business that would be going on, daily office work...after all, the finances were always a concern. Friday would come around and if it had been a particularly bad week, with no recordings or whatever to cover outgoings, he'd walk over to my Mamma and say, 'It's no good darling. Could I borrow the ring?' And, with a grin, she'd take off her engagement ring. It would then be given to Mr White, the lovely chauffeur, and taken to the pawnshop so that 80 orchestral members could be paid. There was, after all, no subsidy."

"Lollipops" being both a child's favourite sweet and Sir Thomas's affectionate term for short musical sweetmeats, Sir Jeremy loved what have since become widely known as "Beecham Lollipops". But the older Beecham could be wickedly pointed with his double entendres (there are one or two beauties on the Sibelius 90th birthday broadcast, released by BBC Legends). Sir Jeremy recalls how "when my future wife Diana and I were to be married, he

sent some of the members of the orchestra down to the church. Beforehand he said, 'Well now, old boy, what would you like us to play?' Oh, I said, I'll leave that to you, Uncle Tom. He thought for a moment, then said: 'I'll tell you what, there's a piece by Massenet – it's called *The Last Sleep of the Virgin*. Naughty!'"

Sir Jeremy speaks with great affection of having been treated "as a fellow conspirator". Sorry? A conspirator? "Oh yes. You see, I went out to join them in Seattle [the period when Beecham was conducting the Seattle Symphony Orchestra]. There was great rivalry between Seattle and San Francisco, and Tom was obviously pushing Seattle, where his loyalty lay, raising money for the orchestra. One of the things he liked to do was to compare the two. He got a 78 of the San Francisco Symphony and one that he'd just done in Seattle, I think one of the lollipops [probably an acetate – there are no commercial 78s with Beecham and the Seattle Symphony]. Between the three of us (I was the imp in the ménage), we acquired some sandpaper and rubbed the surface of the 78 so that it sounded awful. He played them both and said to the audience, at the end, 'My dears, you can see perfectly well which is the better orchestra'."

Betty Humby's approval was an important signal for visitors. Denis Vaughan recalls that if she liked you, you could stay around in their

Founds the **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra** in 1946.

In 1956 he records **La bohème** with Victoria de los Angeles and Jussi Björling

for EMI – it becomes one of the iconic opera sets of the era.

The following year he makes more celebrated recordings for EMI, this time



Rimsky-Korsakov's **Sheherazade** with the RPO and, with the same forces, a set of Haydn's "London" Symphonies

Gives his **last operatic performance**, at

the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires in 1958; two years later, his final concert is with the RPO in Portsmouth.

**Dies** in London on March 8, 1961.



  
*'The memory has stayed with me...gunshot chords which he would slash down with the baton'*  


company that much longer, "and it was good luck for me that she did! I stayed with them in various country houses, and that's when you'd find him at his most relaxed and with completely different attitudes. His knowledge, especially of poetry and literature, made you feel more informed, richer. He gave out humanity and you felt the size of that – you also felt you were tapping into vast resources of knowledge and experience, of warmth and humanity". Being a very capable musician herself, Betty had her opinions, one of which concerned Victoria de los Angeles as Carmen, who she felt was "far too queenly" for the role, and which in turn contributed to delays in completing the famous EMI *Carmen* recording.

### Live versus studio

The Beecham legacy is immense, not only the commercial recordings but, thanks to the co-operation between Beecham's third wife, Lady Shirley, and the archive recordings producer Arthur Ridgewell, a vast corpus of live material has appeared, largely since the advent of CD. Much of this "live" Beecham has surfaced on BBC Legends and "The Beecham Collection" on Somm, which has appreciably widened our experience of the great man's repertoire and interpretative style. I mentioned earlier the Sibelius 90th birthday concert (BBC Legends), which includes adrenalin-boosted versions of the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies and *Tapiola*, but perhaps even more impressive is the 1948 broadcast performance of Delius's *A Village Romeo and Juliet* (Somm), which is so much more intense and at times broadly paced than the contemporaneous EMI 78s. Somm's enterprise is especially valuable because the general consensus rates "Beecham live" rather more highly than Beecham in the studio. In addition to works never commercially recorded by Beecham (some tasty-looking programmes are currently in the pipeline), there are the various "second versions" of works that are well known from Beecham's long-available studio discography but that incorporate the sort of altered detail that those lucky enough to have attended his concerts still recall. For example, Jon Tolansky, who knows Beecham's Haydn records well, recalls hearing the *Military Symphony* at the Royal Festival Hall. "The memory has stayed with me ever since," he says. "What I most noticed in the second, 'military' movement – I can see it as if it were yesterday – was the extraordinary dynamic range of the left hand, the way he brought the orchestra down to these incredible *pianissimos* and how then, when the *fortissimos* arrived, gunshot chords which he would slash down with the baton with his right hand, as Walter Legge used to say, from north-east to south-west. I remember how the impact of seeing him and hearing him totally took me over. I still love his magnificent studio recording but this was a very different kind of experience."

Over the years Beecham's commentators have been copious, varied and often authoritative. "Writing about Tommy" is in effect writing about the mystery of great music-making, and, time and again while speaking to those who played for him, knew him or saw him in concert, the same key word keeps cropping up. That word is "love"; and, for those of us whose Beecham moments are confined to digits or grooves, "Beecham" and "love" remain synonymous concepts. No true music lover can walk away from a great Beecham recording and remain unchanged. 🎧

## Six essential recordings

Classic discs that should grace every collection

### Delius: *A Village Romeo and Juliet*; *Song of the High Hills*; *Irmelin Prelude*

Dorothy Bond, Gordon Clinton, Dennis Dowling, Lorely Dyer, Gwladys Garside, Freda Hart, Leslie Jones, Donald Munro, Margaret Ritchie, Frederick Sharp, René Soames; RPO and Chorus Naxos © ② 8 110982/3

### Delius: *A Village Romeo and Juliet*; *Songs of Sunset*

Fabian Smith, Frederick Sharp, René Soames, Vera Terry, Gordon Clinton, Olga Haley, Roy Henderson; BBC Theatre Chorus; RPO; London Select Choir; LPO Somm © ② SOMM-BEECHAM12 A telling example of how, given certain circumstances, words bow to the expressive supremacy of music. Nowadays the "quaint" English singing style may seem a little dated but the overall effect is overwhelming – the studio recording providing the more intimate experience, the live one a higher ratio of passion. The rapturously beautiful *Song of the High Hills* is another Beecham "must".

### Puccini: *La bohème*; *La bohème, Act 3 - D'onde lieta usci al tuo grido d'amore, 'Mimi's Farewell'*

Jussi Björling, Victoria de los Angeles, Robert Merrill, John Reardon, Giorgio Tozzi, Fernando Corena, etc; RCA Victor Chorus and Orchestra; Columbia Boychoir (1956); Dora Labette, John Brownlee, Heddie Nash; LPO Naxos © ② 8 111249/50 (also on EMI)

Feelings of great tenderness pervade much of this famous performance, where the singers surpass themselves in matching Beecham for pathos and spontaneity. The pre-war version of Act 3 parades parallel sensibilities couched in quite different vocal terms, a useful comparison.

### Sibelius: *Symphony No 2*. Dvořák: *Symphony No 8*

BBC SO, RPO BBC Legends © BBCL4154-2 The rush of adrenalin that surges through the Sibelius sets the heart racing, whereas the Dvořák proves that even in his later years Beecham could combine emotional warmth with unprecedented energy.

### Sibelius: *Symphonies Nos 4 and 7*; *Pelleas and Melisande*; *Swanwhite*; *Tapiola*; *Dance of the Nymphs*

RPO BBC Legends © ② BBCL4041-2 A compelling example of how Beecham "live" brought added voltage to his achievements in the studio, especially in *Tapiola* and the Seventh Symphony. The elegant if slightly unsettling *Dance of the Nymphs* is a vivid example of his mastery in smaller fare.

### 'French Orchestral Music' – Works by Bizet, Chabrier, Fauré and Saint-Saëns

ORTF National Orchestra; RPO; LPO EMI © 379986-2 The natural exuberance of these performances of Chabrier's *Joyeuse marche* and *España* has no 21st-century parallel, whereas *Gwendoline* and *Patrie* are thrillingly dramatic, and the *Dolly Suite* is a memorable example of Beecham's uniquely expressive way with gentler miniatures.





# REICH

## *reverberations*

At 75, musical revolutionary Steve Reich continues to work his own brand of minimalism with new compositions and a major retrospective. But, writes **Philip Clark**, if you think he's mellowed, think again

“**W**hat I feel about my early pieces – things like *Come Out* and *Piano Phase* – and actually in general, the most important thing about any piece of music is the emotional effect it has on the listener. But aim for that effect and you will never achieve it. So what do you do? Well, I've always thought you must go about your business in the best possible way you can as a craftsman, using your inside emotional drive, and hopefully it'll all work out.”

Excuse the duplicity, but that's the quote I used to sign off the last article I wrote about Steve Reich, back in 2003 when he was promoting *Three Tales*. It was a terrible interview – essentially a conversation between two men who didn't want to be there. I had savage man-flu and a word-weary Reich had been holed up in a hotel room all day fielding journalists' questions. I was last in line and atchoo'ed my way through enough questions, which Reich dutifully answered, to get the story, but only subsequently did I realise what a revealing nugget he had handed me, something well worth repeating here. And through the desensitising filter of Nurofen, there was one other standout moment: Reich suddenly mimicked an archetypal conductor down-beat that was loaded with “feeling” – think Bernstein or Kleiber – and said “I got no truck with that”.

Memories which rewind through my mind as, once again, I prepare to speak to Reich. That faux-conductor down-beat? What exactly did Reich mean by that? I'm intrigued, too, to ask those follow-up questions about

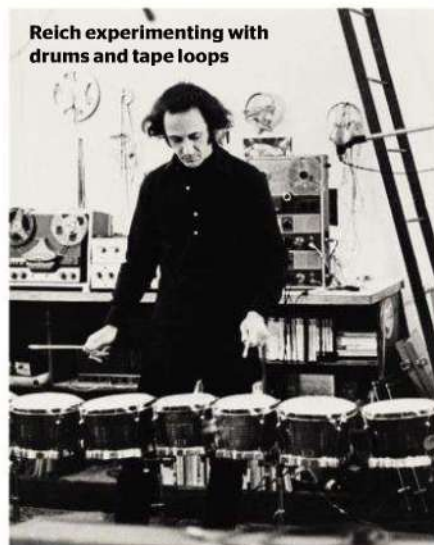
aiming, or rather not aiming, for emotional effect that my feverish flu placed off-limits last time. And the time is right – Reich is 75 this year, a milestone that the Barbican Centre in London will mark in May with a weekend of concerts under the banner “Reverberations: The Influence of Steve Reich”, suggesting that the influence of Steve Reich is a phenomenon at least as important as the music of Steve Reich. At home in New York State (he and his wife moved from

*‘He transforms a moment in history into a different type of art altogether, part documentary, part music’*

their downtown Manhattan apartment a few years ago), Reich is noticeably more at ease, although behind his effortless warmth and charm lurks a combative edge. Some questions are tossed back – “well, what do you think?”, “where did you get that quote?” – and with half our allotted time gone, he reminds me that there's still much ground to be covered.

I remind Reich of our earlier interview, and how his words about emotional effect have remained with me. “Well, I agree with myself,” he laughs. I explain that I admire *Come Out*, his 1966 composition for tape which is based, like its companion piece *It's Gonna Rain*, on a recorded fragment of speech, re-recorded over two tape recorders, one of which gradually falls out of sync so that the speech patterns stutter, then freewheel, towards abstract sound – because its expressive impact is achieved purely through sound. Nowhere does Reich attempt to manipulate this through emotive shifts of harmony or theatrical flourishes which, given that the piece is based on recordings of a black teenager beaten up by the police during the Harlem riots of 1964, shows admirable dignity and restraint. *Come Out* doesn't ask “isn't it terrible what happened?”; rather it transforms a moment in history into a different type of art altogether, part documentary, part music, leaving the rest to the audience's discretion.

“It was very important to establish that the kid's voice sounds like it does and he's talking about a riot situation in Harlem,” Reich explains. “Then his voice turns into this loop, and the loop begins to create the work. Using



Reich experimenting with drums and tape loops





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these generative processes, which lay all the cards on the table, there are enough mysteries to be satisfying. In these early pieces, there's a tension between the bare bones concept – one thing staying put, something else getting faster – and the result of that process, which is totally a more intense experience."

As a description of how music operates, Steve, I say, that almost sounds banal. "So long as the music doesn't sound banal, or else we're in trouble. But that's what a lot of musicians of a serial persuasion who were ruling the roost in the 1960s and '70s said. They would look at a score like *Piano Phase* and tell me there was nothing there. And my answer to that: you go play it."

*Piano Phase*, *Violin Phase* and the lesser-known *Reed Phase* applied the lessons Reich had learnt from *Come Out* and *It's Gonna Rain* to an instrumental canvas. One player keeps a melodic figure running steady as the second player inches slightly ahead; the process is enthralling because the original melody is progressively stripped of its context but remains subliminally active. Then Reich wrote *Four Organs*, in which a single chord is gradually stretched and augmented around a rhythmic chug-a-chug framework provided by a pair of maracas. Throughout the 1970s, Reich developed these basic concepts into ever grander and more ambitious structures; *Drumming* and *Music for 18 Musicians* moved Reich from the cult underground to as overground as one can get, as people started to call this new music "minimalism".

I loved the form-meets-content purity of *Drumming* and *Music for 18 Musicians* but my love affair with Reich's music then went through a rocky patch. In 1990 I bought the CD of Reich's orchestral piece *The Four Sections* (1986), performed by the LSO under Michael Tilson Thomas, and paired with his classic 1973 *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organs* played by Reich's own ensemble. But something felt instinctively wrong. A Reichian melodic fragment played by an instrumentalist in his own ensemble sounded fresh and expressively blameless; bowed by the string section of the LSO, however, Reich's melodies leant towards precisely that "conductorly" push-pull sense of expression that he warned me about in 2003. It was like Rothko's blues and purples suddenly outlining landscapes and bowls of fruit instead of hovering in space. Nor did Michael Tilson Thomas have any audible function in *The Four Sections* other than as a human metronome; the more consciously MTT shapes the phrases, in fact, the less Reichian the music sounds. And proof of my misgivings came with *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ*, the sluggish rhythmic attack of the LSO suddenly replaced by the Reich



The composer in control in 1989

*For John Adams, writing for orchestra makes sense, but I was asking the players to do things that are wrong'*

Ensemble's crisp rhythmic articulation and bebop-like, arrowhead impetus.

Telling a composer you hate their piece is always high-risk but Reich takes it like a man. "I quite like *The Four Sections* but you're right: it's the wrong orchestration. I haven't written anything for orchestra since 1987, because after *The Four Sections* I realised the rhythmic intricacy of what I do demands one player to a part. For John Adams, writing for orchestra makes absolute sense, but I just don't need 18 first violins; in the orchestral pieces

I wrote, I was asking the players to do things that, really, are wrong to ask 80 musicians to do. If you think about *Come Out* and *Piano Phase*, those pieces feed off the idea of pairs of matching timbres – if it was piano and electric organ, the piano might overpower the organ and you wouldn't hear either the process or the melodies that emerge from inside the phasing. And recent things, like *Double Sextet*, *Cello Counterpoint* and *2x5*, still rely on matched pairs of instruments.

"You see, before the microphone was invented, the only way to get volume was to have numbers. But with the microphone all that changed. Miles Davis played trumpet, yes, but that 'Miles Davis sound' could only exist because he put a harmon mute inside his instrument and then played it through a microphone; it was the microphone that



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allowed Miles's horn a presence in halls designed for 100-piece symphony orchestras."

So the microphone is integral to Reich's concept of orchestration? "Absolutely. It's my job to orchestrate my music as well as I can and I use amplification not to make it loud, but to balance, say, the xylophone, which is naturally louder than the piano, so that the upper register of the xylophone and piano blend. It's nothing to do with the sociology of the orchestra – the fact that rehearsal time is never enough, and there are musicians sitting there who aren't into the music, all of which is true – it's just that in terms of acoustic engineering, the orchestra is wrong for my music."

I mention Tilson Thomas's role in *The Four Seasons*. What is it about Reich's music that makes the traditional role of a conductor seem obsolete? "From a classical perspective, all my pieces are chamber music. The musicians don't follow anybody, they listen to each other. Every piece I wrote between *Piano Phase* and *Music for 18 Musicians* includes a specified number of repeats – so the players can repeat a particular bar, say, between three and seven times. When I made these pieces initially, I didn't even write in the number of repeats because I trusted the musicians' instincts; the idea is, you listen to what you're doing, and listen to the person next to you, and when the time feels right, you move to the next bar. So these pieces are based on an

*'Brahms, Mahler, Wagner, Sibelius – if it all disappeared tomorrow, I wouldn't even know'*

expanded idea of chamber music, as opposed to conducting. And then musicians give you feedback. I tried *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ* with my ensemble. I could feel the palpable lack of interest around the room so I got rid of it. The emotional reaction of musicians you trust is priceless."

When I followed *Music for 18 Musicians* with a score recently, making a connection between eye and ear stressed how far Reich has removed himself from a Western classical mindset. Its refrain-and-chorus-like structure reminds me of a vastly enlarged popular song format; clarinets and voices move together in rhythmic unison like saxophones and brass in a big-band; the endlessly displaced rhythms fly straight out of Charlie Parker; the vibraphone refrain which heralds each new section, appearing every time either with augmentation or diminution, suggests the Notre Dame polyphony of the early French composer Pérotin; and the bass parts

are as catchy and uncluttered as a Marvin Gaye boogaloo bass-line. Something else becomes clear. All this music that feeds into Reich's sound world relies on a fixed pulse, a groove. That's why Reich has no truck with a conductor's rubato.

"A musician who spends his life playing Schubert is just not going to be able to play my music," Reich nods sagely. "Brahms is a great composer – his invertible counterpoint at the 12th is, like, really fantastic – but I don't want to hear a note of it, not now, not later, not ever. Same thing for Mahler, Wagner, Sibelius. If it all disappeared tomorrow, I wouldn't even know. If you don't follow that discipline of a fixed beat, I'm not interested. In fact I'm profoundly disinterested. The one thing people asked me when I wrote *2x5*, which is for the instrumentation of a rock band, is how can you expect classical musicians to rock?

"But this generation has produced a new kind of musician who knows how to play Stockhausen but who also knows about John Coltrane, DJ culture and African music. On the recording of *2x5*, Mark Stewart plays electric guitar. He trained as a cellist at Eastman and is Paul Simon's musical director. So he's a classical musician and he's a rock musician. The other guitarist, Bryce Dessner, went to Yale and plays in The National, a rock band you're going to hear a lot about. So he's a classical musician and he's a rock musician! I think time is on most composers' sides. Attitudes change through osmosis. This music's in the air. Of course these young guys know how to play it." ●

*"Reverberations: The Influence of Steve Reich" will be at London's Barbican Centre on Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 May*

## The Reich stuff: five essential recordings

### Piano Phase

London Steve Reich Ensemble / Kevin Griffiths

CPO (P) CPO777 337-2 (9/08)

Performed by Keith Ford and Vincent Cover with energy and speed, this is a monumental and steely recording with real clarity in all tones of the piano.

### Music for 18 Musicians

Anonymous Ensemble / Steve Reich

ECM New Series (P) 821 417-2

The original recording of the work and a landmark release in the history of new music on record.

### Different Trains

Lyon National Orchestra / David Robertson

Naïve Montaigne (P) MO782167 (4/05)

The original string quartet version of Reich's haunting, hypnotic work is here realised on a far larger, captivating scale.

### You Are (Variations)

Los Angeles Master Chorale; Ensemble Modern / Grant Gershon

Nonesuch (P) 7559 79891-2 (10/05)

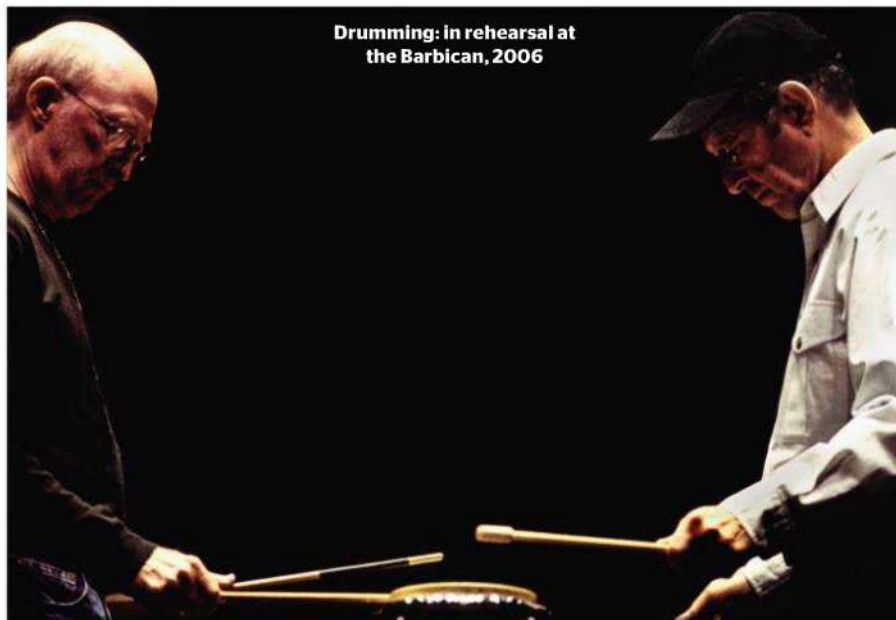
Grant Gershon leads a mystical account, with the Los Angeles Master Chorale responding to the inner glow of these Hebrew and English settings.

### 2x5

Bang on a Can

Nonesuch (P) 7559 79786-2 (A/10)

Brilliant playing of a work that seems to explode the inner workings of a rock band at full throttle.



Drumming: in rehearsal at the Barbican, 2006





# ANOTHER MASTER'S MUSICK

Since winning Gramophone's Recording of the Year for the last volume in their Byrd series, The Cardinall's Musick have been immersed in several new projects, not least recording the music of Robert Parsons. **Richard Lawrence** catches up with them mid-take

Peter Ackroyd's novel, *English Music*, includes a chapter in which William Byrd is instructing three pupils. They walk in his garden which, he says, "makes me think of our English masters, whose music...is laid out for our content". Citing a group of composers taken from Morley's *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, Ackroyd's Byrd continues: "The curving lines of those lawns and meadows yonder is like their own lineage...All of them conceived their best path lay through the old music...the musick of the country before this time."

The Cardinall's Musick made their name with recordings of music by Nicholas Ludford and Robert Fayrfax, and they have recently completed their survey of Byrd's Latin sacred music, the last disc of which is the current *Gramophone* Recording of the Year, which they have followed up with the "Missa Cantantibus Organis" (reviewed on page 89). Yet they are already engaged upon discovering another of Ackroyd's "English masters" (Fayrfax being one): Robert Parsons, about whom little is known save that he drowned in the river Trent in 1571 or 1572 aged about 40.

The ensemble's new disc, out this September, includes the two English anthems and all the motets, including the exquisite *Ave Maria*, which they have recorded before (7/00). The chosen venue these days is the Fitzalan Chapel at Arundel Castle and it is there, on a cold November day, that I catch up with them. Why Parsons? I ask Andrew Carwood, the co-founder and conductor of the group. "He sits in the middle of the 16th century. I have a theory that Parsons, Byrd, William Mundy, the elder Alfonso Ferrabosco and possibly Robert White were all connected. There's a similarity between some

of their compositions, they wrote some of the same sort of things: Lamentations (though not in Parsons' case), Funeral Responses, settings of the psalm *Domine quis habitabit?* Having done all this end-of-the-century Byrd, I'm interested in going back a bit and joining up the Ludford/Fayrfax generation with the Byrd generation by exploring the middle. We don't know where Parsons came from, but the absence of any reference to a home town in the record of his appointment as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal suggests that he was from London."

In the freezing Fitzalan Chapel, the last session is underway. Ten singers – two to a part – are recording the Ninth Respond from the Office of the Dead, *Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna*. The recording team is in a separate room, but can see the performers on a television monitor. The producer is Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, well known to *Gramophone* readers. After the first take, which has been interrupted – a rare event, I am told – by the rumble of a passing aeroplane, the singers troop in to listen.

Producer and conductor emphasise the need to give proper weight to the "false relations", the spicy semitone clashes so characteristic of Tudor music. Later on, and more than once, Freeman-Attwood pushes the singers on their intonation. It all seems to be taken in good part; indeed I'm struck by the prevailing geniality, the consequence of experience and mutual respect. Freeman-Attwood took over the Byrd project from the tenth volume onwards and it turns out that he and Carwood go back a long way, having been fellow postgraduates at Christ Church, Oxford, in the 1980s. After the break come a motet, *Peccantem me quotidie*, and an anthem, *Holy Lord God Almighty*. The singers have not seen the latter before: it's

*I have a theory that  
Parsons, Byrd, William  
Mundy and Robert White  
were all connected'*





The Fitzalan Chapel (far left) is the location for the Parsons recording. Producer Jonathan Freeman-Attwood and conductor Andrew Carwood (left) work closely together throughout the session

soon despatched, but not before Freeman-Attwood has again made comments on the tuning.

Like his fellow singers, Robert Evans is a freelance. How does The Cardinal's Musick differ from other groups? "Like most organisations, it comes down to the person at the top. I've known Andrew a long time and I've a lot of respect for the way he works: he's a singer, so he understands what we're up against and how to get the best out of us. The partnership with Jonathan works very well. And I love working in this wonderful building: we come down for three days, staying overnight, so you've got time to think about the music and if things aren't going very well you've got time to put them right."

Sometimes the line-up is one to a part; here it's two. Does he have a preference? "With single voices you stand in one line. I'm a baritone, and to be able to hear the bass purring beneath me is a real joy. But it would be difficult with Parsons: the lines are long, sustained, quite athletic, and it's good to have another voice to complement you."

Rebecca Outram has been with the group since the Ludford recordings of the mid-1990s. She is equally enthusiastic: "What I love about Andrew is that he appreciates his singers' musicality and independence of musical mind. He will often enjoy the way one of us sings a phrase and he'll say, 'I'd like us all to phrase it like that,' so there's certainly a sense of our working as a team. It's not harder singing two to a part, just different. It could be harder to tune, but we tend to work with the same people, so we know their voice and how they work. Today is unusual, because I'm normally a soprano and I've been singing with Caroline Trevor, who's normally an alto: we've been singing 'mean', which is a middle-range part." Does she enjoy this music, and is there anywhere to breathe? "I love it – the broad sweep, the long lines, the melismas; and the shape of the phrases usually lends itself to good breathing places: you can see the shape and the language of the phrase, even if you're just on one vowel."

Over a cup of tea after the session, I ask Andrew Carwood the question I put to Evans and Outram: what is different about a choir made up of singers who sing with other groups? "We have a visceral, powerful attachment to the music. I think we sing it in a very different way from other groups, especially the English music, which is of symphonic proportions. We did two pieces of Parsons yesterday – enormous, 12- or 13-minute pieces: huge gestures, long build-ups, something the Continental composers couldn't even get close to doing. I've allowed the singers

## The Cardinal's Musick: essential listening

### Music at All Souls, Oxford

ASV Gaudeamus (M) CDGAU196  
A marvellous anthology of 15th- and early 16th-century English pieces, including Parsons' *Ave Maria*.

### Tallis: *Gaude gloriosa*

Hyperion (E) CDA67548  
Another anthology, this time of Latin works by Byrd's master and friend. At 17 minutes, the

magnificent *Gaude gloriosa* is the longest piece; equally appealing is *O nata lux*.

### Guerrero:

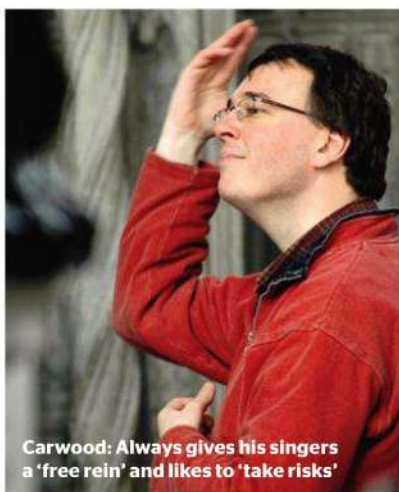
### Missa Congratulamini mihi

Hyperion (E) CDA67836  
The Cardinal's Musick move away from English music with this joyful Mass for Easter and the motet by Thomas Crecquillon on which it is based.

to sing, I encourage them to develop their voices. They have to pull in the same direction with their phrasing, but beyond that they've a free rein. It's not always perfect, but I've never used the word 'blend'. I like the more earthy, compelling interpretations. You have to take risks."

What of the future? The original Byrd project on ASV was to have comprised 20 discs, culminating in the Great Service. Hyperion took over at volume 10, but has stopped at volume 13, limiting the series to Byrd's Latin output. "We are recording the Great Service in April. The English pieces are much shorter, without the same emotional intensity as the Latin pieces, so one could find oneself in a series of wonderful gems, which would be like looking at a collection of miniatures. We are planning a tour round the country of Byrd's Latin works and we'll make an announcement then about the English music. I'm talking more about music written in English, not music written for the Church of England: pieces in three or four parts and consort songs with viols, written for performance at home." I am impressed by Carwood's care for planning. "It would need to be very carefully themed, with a mixture of styles. I would love it to have the quality of Graham Johnson's Schubert Lieder collection."

On the way to the station, I meet one of the recording engineers who has lost his keys. Several calls later, on the train, Carwood finds them in his briefcase and returns to Arundel. It's reassuring to discover, after a day of effortless achievement, that the team is fallible after all. (C)



Carwood: Always gives his singers a 'free rein' and likes to 'take risks'



# Peter's friends

Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* is a work of considerable charm for people of all ages.

**Jeremy Nicholas** enters the menagerie of recordings on offer



I was about 12 years old when a chiropodist friend of my parents, seeing how much I enjoyed classical music, gave me his entire collection of 78s. Included among the Toscaninis, Cortots, Galli-Curcis and Kreislers was HMV C4046-8: Wilfred Pickles narrating *Peter and the Wolf* with the Philharmonia under Igor Markevitch. It was my introduction to the piece. Pickles (1904-78) was the presenter of a then immensely popular radio quiz show, *Have a Go!*, and was obvious casting for the role of narrator: a celebrity who was friends with the microphone. It's currently available as a download. The 1951 *Record Guide*, in praising Pickles's narration, noted that the chief theme of the piece (Peter/violins) "appeared to be an anagram of the 'Lambeth Walk'", and was of the opinion that "though amusing enough at first hearing, *Peter and the Wolf* palls, once the element of surprise has been eliminated". It is a comment of which I was frequently reminded when preparing this survey of recordings.

The story of the work's genesis is well known. In June 1935, Prokofiev and his family were taken to the Moscow Children's Theatre, then under the direction of Natalia Satz. A new Children's Theatre was to be opened the following February and Satz

had the idea of opening the building with a work that would familiarise children with the instruments of the orchestra. Prokofiev, while working on *Romeo and Juliet*, had composed some simple piano pieces for children (*Music for Children*, Op 65), which had prompted the notion of writing "a symphonic fairy-tale". So when Satz approached him she found him not only amenable to the commission but ready with ideas for a storyline. "We came to the conclusion," Satz recalled, "that we had to find characters that could easily be associated

**'Prokofiev's piano pieces for children prompted the notion of writing a symphonic fairy-tale'**

with the concrete sound of different musical instruments." Prokofiev agreed: "Sharply contrasting characters must have correspondingly contrasting sound-colours, and every role must have its leitmotif."

A rough draft of the text was given to a lyricist acquaintance of Natalia Satz who wrote a scenario in rhyming couplets with the title *How Peter Outwitted the Wolf*. Prokofiev vetoed the verse, feeling that it would detract

from the music, and set about writing the text himself. For those who don't know the story – I wonder how many reading this piece do not – the polyglot Nicolas Slonimsky has provided a succinct summary: "Peter is a Soviet boy who takes care of his pet animals, including a bird, a duck, and a cat. When a wolf invades his domestic zoo, Peter organises a hunt, rounds up the predator and takes him to the zoo." It took Prokofiev barely more than a fortnight to compose and orchestrate the music. *Peter and the Wolf* was given its first performance on the stage of the Central Children's Theatre on May 2, 1936. It was conducted and narrated by Satz herself.

Among the earliest recordings were several from America: the first – probably the world-premiere recording – was made in 1939 for RCA Victor by **Serge Koussevitzky** and his Boston Symphony Orchestra with the Western character actor **Richard Hale** as narrator; soon after, Milton Cross, the long-serving "Voice of the Met", and pianist Mario Janero recorded it on four 10-inch discs for the Musicraft label. In 1946 Disney released an animated *Peter and the Wolf* as a segment of *Make Mine Music*, a kind of pops'n'classics sequel to *Fantasia*. It was narrated by Sterling Holloway, a stalwart of many Disney cartoons. The soundtrack was released on disc, and the film later included in the reissue





Peter as imagined by Suzie Templeton in her Oscar-winning animated film of Peter and the Wolf



## The Gramophone Collection

of *Fantasia* in 1947. **Leopold Stokowski** was not the conductor on that occasion, as he had been for the original *Fantasia* in 1940, but had already recorded the work in 1941 with **Basil Rathbone** and the All-American Orchestra. Stokowski's soloists vividly characterise their parts, tempi are brisk, while Rathbone, the definitive Sherlock Holmes of his day, injects pace and drama into the text.

Ah, the text. Great literature it ain't. Like many another composer who has tried his hand at the written word, Prokofiev was no prose poet. It doesn't help that the inflexible, stodgy English texts accompanying the various published scores are translations by linguists who fail utterly to differentiate between prose to be read in the head and prose to be read out loud. That is why almost every narrator brings his or her personal variation to the printed text in an effort to make it more colloquial and breathe life into it. More of that later.

An American recording does not guarantee an American-accented narrator. South African-born Rathbone spoke with a refined English accent, as did the fruitier-toned Australian-born **Cyril Ritchard** (1897-1977) who recorded the work in the Broadwood Hotel, Philadelphia, with that city's orchestra under **Eugene Ormandy** in 1957. Ritchard uses the microphone intimately (a lovely reading) while the orchestra is set behind him in a spacious acoustic. Conversely, **Eleanor Roosevelt** declaims the text as if she were addressing the Daughters of the American Revolution, while Koussevitzky in this second recording (1950) with his Boston players is heard in the attractive intimacy of the chamber-like Tanglewood Concert Hall. The disc, with its coupling of Sibelius's Symphony No 2, is likely to appeal more to Koussevitzky fans than children.

### THE HISTORICAL CHOICE



**Rathbone:** All-American Orch / **Stokowski**  
Avid Ⓢ AMSC601

The sound resembles a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon but, remarkably, this works in the music's favour. It's hugely enjoyable, coupled with (narrator-less) performances of *Carnival of the Animals* (Stokowski), *Young Person's Guide* (Sargent) and *Jeux d'enfants* (Dorati).

Two opera singers are among those with a greater feeling for words and atmosphere. **Eric Shilling**, the eminent bass-baritone who died in 2006, may not be a big-star name but his musical voice and exemplary enunciation are perfectly matched by **Karel Ančerl** and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra (notably juicy woodwind and characterful brass). Sadly, he omits the introductory section, but the vigorous pacing of the music, the matching acoustic for narrator and orchestra, and the sense of a proper, integrated performance make this a leading contender.

Picture a cuddly, rosy-cheeked grandmother surrounded by eager young faces as she reads them a bedtime story. That is the image conjured up by Canadian contralto **Margaret Forrester**, who died in June last year. As the mother of five children with several grandchildren, she had clearly had plenty of practice as a story-teller. Her vivacious, warm-hearted recording dates from 1991. The Montreal Metropolitan Orchestra and conductor Agnès Grossmann are fine (no more than that) but the two-disc set also has Forrester in her soft Canadian accent narrating Prokofiev's *Summer Day* and *Winter Bonfire* (including sound effects), a booklet with the full texts, and Symphony No 7.

A third and different sort of singer provides another approach. **Sting** may not have the most melodious speaking voice nor be unduly concerned about enunciation (and his Grandfather characterisation is terrible) but he brings, like few others, a real sense of adventure to proceedings. **Claudio Abbado** and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe win first prize for the timpani/gunshots and combine high spirits with light-heartedness while lingering for moments of touching pathos (try the passage after the Duck's demise). The clarinetist, by the way, is one of only a handful on disc who really sends the Cat scampering up the tree (*accelerando* and *precipitato* as Prokofiev demands) to escape the Wolf.

**Lenny Henry's** narration (under **Jacques Pési**) has the same contemporary touch as Sting's. Children will immediately respond to his enthusiasm, charm and palpable sincerity. Unfortunately, instead of a flute for the Bird we have a Chinese *sheng*, and a *tiple* for the Duck (great in a Catalan *cobla* band but not here). Devastatingly, there's an oboe d'amore for the Cat instead of a clarinet and, ludicrously, three accordions for the Wolf instead of French horns.

**André Previn's** narration is, by contrast, so laid-back that it borders on the dismissive. Intoned in a colourless voice, he appears to be speaking in a catacomb – a pity, because he leads one of the best-engineered and most

responsive recordings. The RPO's strings are suave and playful, the brass and percussion are given their head and small details, like the three unearthly bars of harmonics played (*doloroso*) by the cellos after the Wolf has swallowed the Duck or the castanets in the final march, are lucidly captured.

Another conductor/narrator offers a more generalised view of the score but a more practised and thoughtful narration. **Leonard Bernstein** recorded in 1960 (and, like Ormandy, in a hotel – St George, Brooklyn) is the only narrator who introduces himself – “This is Leonard Bernstein” – and begins not by telling his audience what the instruments represent but by asking them to guess. “Right again...My, you really know this piece, don't you?”. With his mellifluous speaking voice, Bernstein's brief additions to the text add clarity.

Three generations of Prokofievs have recorded the work: **Lina Prokofiev**, the composer's widow, was the first, in 1986, and a remarkably feisty and engaging reading she gives too, with a voice that belies a lady then in her 89th year (she died in London aged 91 in 1989). Well recorded, **Neeme Järvi** is a routine rather than inspired partner. In 1991 Lina's son **Oleg Prokofiev** (1928-98) and his 16-year-old son **Gabriel** shared the narration. Oleg (with his accented English) and Gabriel (RP English) are charming amateurs, overshadowed by the vibrant playing of the New London Orchestra under **Ronald Corp**. However, the disc includes *The Ugly Duckling* narrated by soprano Penelope Walmsley-Clark, *Winter Bonfire* and *Summer Day*, full texts and Natalia Satz's account of the work's genesis taken from her autobiography.

For Finnish speakers, **Lasse Pöysti** is the accomplished *kertoja* with **Jukka-Pekka Saraste**

### THE UPDATED CHOICE



**Sting:** COE / **Abbado**  
DG Ⓢ 429 396-2GH

Sting's involvement is infectious – one really gets the sense of a dad performing for his kids in his modernised, colloquial reading. Claudio Abbado and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe give arguably the best overall account of the score on disc.



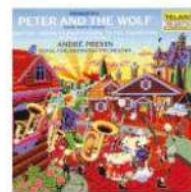
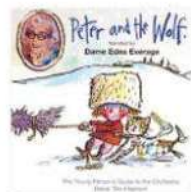
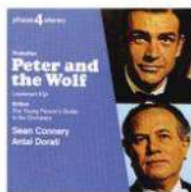
## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

on the Ondine label. French speakers can turn to **Jacques Martin** as *récitant*, Germans to **Marius Müller-Westernhagen** as *Sprecher* and Spaniards to **Miguel Bosé** as *recitador*. All three have the same backing from **Kent Nagano** and the Lyon Opéra Orchestra and are available in the same impressive six-CD set from Warner Classics of Prokofiev's stage works and film scores. The English version is narrated by **Patrick Stewart**, aka Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the Starship *Enterprise*. Stewart and Nagano are polished, accurate, sound beautiful and are quite uninvolved.

Nagano does a better job with the Russian National Orchestra. **Sophia Loren** is an accomplished and sympathetic narrator. Unhappily, the rest of the short (47'50") disc is taken up with Mikhail Gorbachev mouthing mercifully brief platitudes in Russian, and Bill Clinton narrating a monumentally nauseous and politically correct version of the tale to the accompaniment of some elevator music. The upside is that all the narrators' royalties go to charity.

**Hermione Gingold's** eccentrically ripe rendering is a delight (our own Edward Greenfield's improved version of the traditional text is far more narrator-friendly) but sometimes strays off-mike. Her unlikely partners are **Karl Böhm** and the Vienna Philharmonic who provide the best Wolf's entrance of all, the cymbals and brass creating a truly menacing atmosphere. DG pairs this with *Carnival of the Animals* interspersed with Ogden Nash's anachronistic verses.

**Richard Baker**, the broadcaster and music buff, had one of the great microphone voices of recent times. His narration, ideally balanced against the orchestra, bears repeated listening. **Raymond Leppard** and the New Philharmonia don't miss a trick. The coupling is *The Young*



## DATE / ARTISTS

## RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

1939	Hale, Boston SO / <b>Koussevitzky</b>	Pearl (P) GEMMCD9487 (2/40*)
1941	<b>Rathbone</b> , All-American Orch / <b>Stokowski</b>	Avid (P) AMSC601 (11/98)
1950	<b>Roosevelt</b> , Boston SO / <b>Koussevitzky</b>	Naxos (S) 8 111290
1954	<b>Baker</b> , New Philh Orch / <b>Leppard</b>	CIP (S) 382230-2
1957	<b>Ritchard</b> , Philadelphia Orch / <b>Ormandy</b>	Sony (B) SBK62638 (11/60*)
1959	<b>Richardson</b> , LSO / <b>Sargent</b>	Decca (M) 2 458 595-2DF2 (1/92*)
1960	<b>Bernstein</b> , NYPO	Sony (M) SMK60175
1963	<b>Shilling</b> , Czech PO / <b>Ančerl</b>	Supraphon (M) SU3676-2
1965	<b>Connery</b> , RPO / <b>Dorati</b>	London (M) 444 104-2LPF
1969	<b>McCowen</b> , Concertgebouw Orch / <b>Haitink</b>	Philips (M) 2 442 278-2PM2
1974/75	<b>Gingold</b> , VPO / <b>Böhm</b>	DG (P) 415 351-2GH
1985	<b>Wogan</b> , Boston Pops Orch / <b>Williams</b>	Philips (P) 412 559-2PH
1986	<b>Sting</b> , COE / <b>Abbado</b>	DG (P) 429 396-2GH (4/91), (P) DVD 073 4267GH
1986	<b>L Prokofiev</b> , SNO / <b>N Järvi</b>	Chandos (P) CHAN8511 (5/87), (M) CHAN10484, (B) CHAN2022 (10/06)
1986	<b>Previn</b> , RPO	Telarc (P) CD80126 (5/87)
1988	<b>Gielgud</b> , Acad of London / <b>Stamp</b>	Virgin (S) 562497-2 (9/89*)
1989	<b>Nicholas</b> , Czecho-Slovak Rad SO / <b>Lenárd</b>	Naxos (S) 8 550335, (S) 8 550499
1989	<b>Lee</b> , English Stg Orch / <b>Menuhin</b>	Nimbus (P) N15192
1991	<b>O &amp; G Prokofiev</b> , New London Orch / <b>Corp</b>	Hyperion (B) CDH55177
1991	<b>Forrester</b> , Montreal Metropolitan Orch / <b>Grossmann</b>	CBC (P) 2 SMCD5118-2
1992	<b>Pöysti</b> (F), Helsinki Rad SO / <b>Saraste</b>	Ondine (P) ODE793-2
1993	<b>Stewart/Martin</b> (F), <b>Müller-Westernhagen</b> (GER), <b>Bosé</b> (ESP), Lyon Opéra Orch / <b>Nagano</b>	Warner (B) (P) 0927 49636-2
1997	<b>Everage</b> , Melbourne SO / <b>Lanchbery</b>	Naxos (S) 8 554170
1997	<b>Dowell</b> , Royal Op Orch / <b>Murphy</b> (Royal Ballet School)	ArtHaus (P) DVD 100 102
1999	<b>Henry</b> , ens / <b>Pési</b>	Virgin (M) 561782-2 (5/00)
2002	<b>Loren</b> , Russian Nat Orch / <b>Nagano</b>	Pentatone (P) (S) PTC5186 011 (2/04)
2006	Philh Orch / <b>Stephenson</b> (dir Templeton)	ArtHaus (P) DVD 101 804GB

*Person's Guide*, with Eric Crozier's dry-as-dust introductory text actually made to sound interesting by Baker, and Robert Donat's recording of Rawsthorne's *Practical Cats* conducted by the composer (if *Peter and Babar* are fairly easy to perform live and *Façaide* is challenging, believe me, *Practical Cats* is the killer of all narrator-and-orchestra works.)

My own version of *Peter* (which I won't attempt to review!) was added to an early Naxos CD with the Czecho-Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra under **Ondrej Lenárd**. That was issued initially without narration, an oddity you can still track down (the only other CD recording I've found without narration is Tatiana Nikolaieva playing her piano transcription). My take on it survived in the catalogue until it was superseded by **Dame Edna Everage** in 1997. Her "possumised" version has sold by the truckload but, for me, an Australian housewife telling the story is funny only on the first hearing. Nor is the playing of the Melbourne SO under **John Lanchbery** anywhere near outstanding.

**Sean Connery's** contribution (1965) was also recorded in a separate location to that of his partners, the Royal Philharmonic under **Antal Dorati**. He had just four hours free to read Gabrielle Hilton's revised narrative in a suite at the London Hilton before dashing off to Greece to be 007 again in *Thunderball* and donating his royalties to Dr Barnardo's. Connery's velvet voice is all right but too consistently *sotto voce*, lacking variety in tone, pace and characterisation. **Christopher Lee** (Scaramanga to Roger Moore's 007) uses his rich bass-baritone to chilling effect in a masterly and musical reading aided by **Yehudi Menuhin's** lively handling of the score. Lee, though, is placed rather too backwardly against the orchestra, and the couplings (Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony and Violin Concerto No 1) are not ideal first choices for young children. **Alec McCowen** does all the voices – and does them very well (a particularly fine Duck) – but I question some of the changes to the text, such as inserting a final plea from the Duck ("Let me out, let me

## THE DVD CHOICE



Philh Orch / **Stephenson** (dir Suzie Templeton)  
ArtHaus Musik (P) DVD 101 804GB

The score remains intact but the storyline is given a facelift with a grim contemporary opening sequence and some genuinely funny animal antics that make this a captivating experience for children. The film won the 2008 Academy Award for Best Short Animated Film.





pays tribute to

# SIR THOMAS BEECHAM BART., CH

29th April 1879 - 8th March 1961

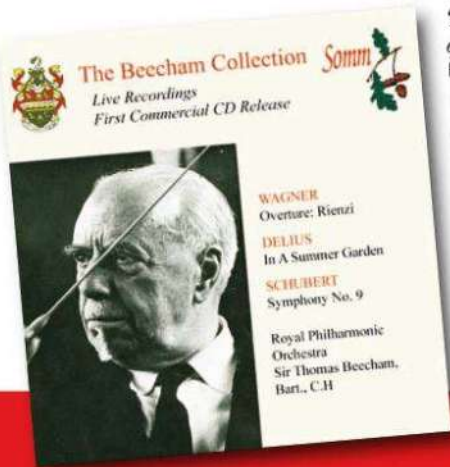
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Rob Barnett - MusicWeb International.

Mozart, Alwyn, Grieg, SOMM-BEECHAM 23.

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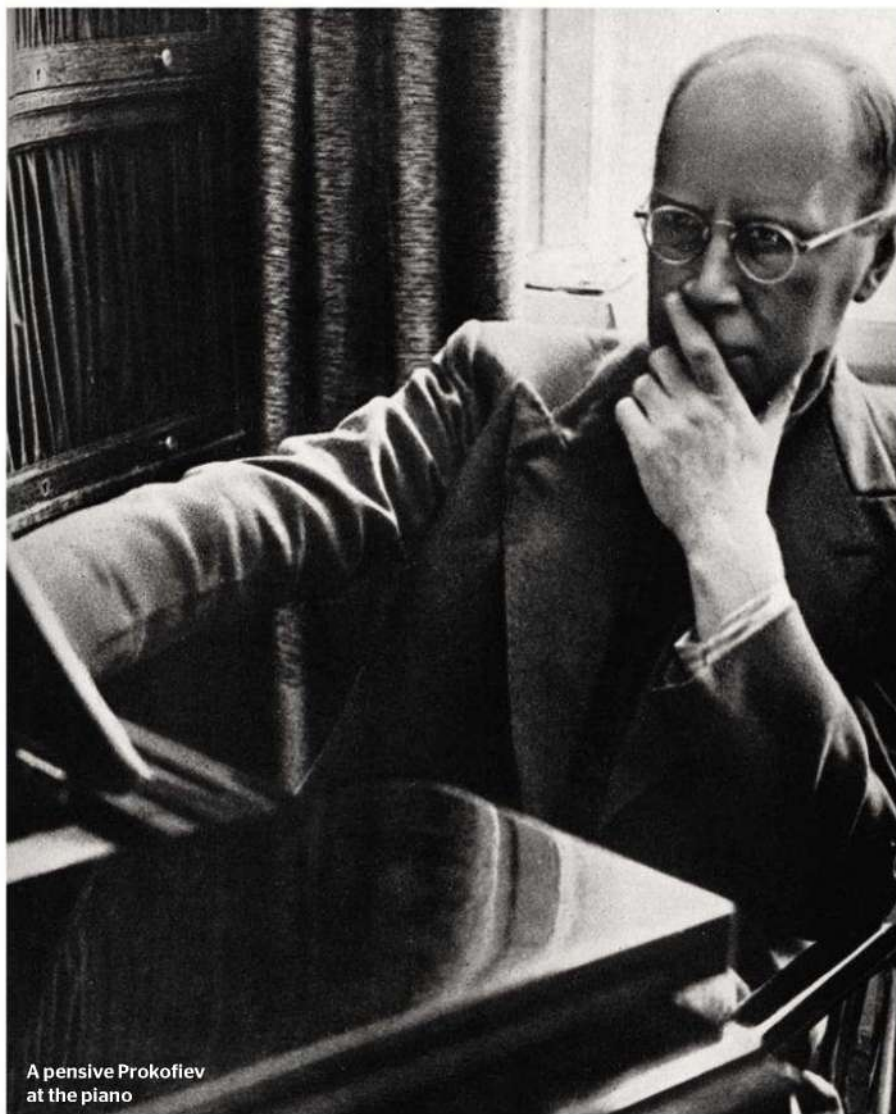
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## The Gramophone Collection



A pensive Prokofiev  
at the piano

out of here"). His conductor, **Bernard Haitink**, who shares the role with others on a twofer of favourite Prokofiev suites, is not alone in departing from some of Prokofiev's tempo markings, to no bad effect (eg the Hunters' entrance, faster than crotchet=116).

**John Gielgud**, in the first of two recordings, proves more warmly engaging than either Lee or McCowen, speaking the traditional text with that extraordinary and (to my ears) beautiful voice – though what young children today will make of his fluting tones I have no idea. Virgin Classics' booklet, though, is a disgrace.

If Wilfred Pickles was my first Peter, my benchmark version for years was the recording by Gielgud's close friend **Ralph Richardson** with the LSO and **Malcolm Sargent**. Recorded in 1959, it still sounds amazingly well for its age but the performance now seems formal and old-fashioned. The LSO soloists are not encouraged to enjoy themselves and,

though Sir Ralph is an avuncular story-teller, he is clearly a relative in front of whom it would be wise not to misbehave. However, Decca's twofer in which it appears in its latest incarnation is the most complete collection of classics for kids on the market.

The CD survey ends as it began with a great radio personality. Recorded back in 1985 with the Boston Pops and **John Williams**, **Terry Wogan** has one of the best microphone techniques in the business, and his mischievous, tongue-in-cheek delivery of the text adapted to his own persona is freshly minted, his tone perfectly calculated to win over today's generation of youngsters (the American release of the disc featured Dudley Moore as narrator).

Radio, as we know, has all the best pictures but three DVDs of *Peter* offer different and enchanting visual realisations of Prokofiev's vision, even if his original purpose becomes

## THE TOP CHOICE



**Baker**, New Philh Orch / **Leppard**

CfP © 382230-2

It's a real pleasure to listen to a speaker who treats the microphone as an intimate friend and the traditional text with respect, managing to do so without drawing undue attention to himself. Baker's narration, ideally balanced against the orchestra, bears repeated listening.

a secondary consideration. Matthew Hart's choreography for the **Royal Ballet School** in 1997 with Ian Spurling's stunning design is as stylish as it is witty (the Hunters are a hoot), neatly danced by the youngsters and watched over by no less than Anthony Dowell as story-teller and Grandfather. The Abbado/Sting *Peter* is given an original and quirky visual realisation courtesy of Roger Law and his *Spitting Image* puppets. It's clever, delightfully dotty (if a little knowing and offering no exercise for a young imagination), but kids of my acquaintance sit entranced and wide-eyed.

Then there is **Suzie Templeton's** Oscar-winning animated film from 2006, already a classic of its kind. There is no narrator – none is needed – for the updated story unfolds with logic and comedic balletic precision in, arguably, the only attempt to bring some psychological realism to Prokofiev's sketchy tale. Apologies to David Bowie, Alec Clunes, Jacqueline du Pré, George Raft, Johnny Morris, Beatrice Lillie, Angela Rippon, Willie Rushton, Boris Karloff, Peter Ustinov, Frankie Howerd, Mia Farrow, Ben Kingsley, Oda Slobodskaya, Eric Porter and Michael Flanders, but I've heard enough. From a short list of Richard Baker, Hermione Gingold, Terry Wogan and Sting, my young friends Sam (10) and Jessie (9) unhesitatingly chose Sting with Abbado. But if you prefer the Urtext spoken by a master narrator with a perfectly modulated voice, it has to be Richard Baker with Raymond Leppard's detailed, affectionate and robust musical illustrations. ©



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# NEW RELEASES

[www.hyperion-records.co.uk](http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk)

## ALLEGRI MISERERE AND THE MUSIC OF ROME

The Cardinal's Musick finished 2010 in a blaze of glory with their Gramophone Recording of the Year award for the last volume of their Byrd Edition – a fitting tribute to the soaring artistry of the group and their director, Andrew Carwood. Their eagerly-awaited next disc features music from late sixteenth-century Rome. THE CARDINAL'S MUSICK  
ANDREW CARWOOD

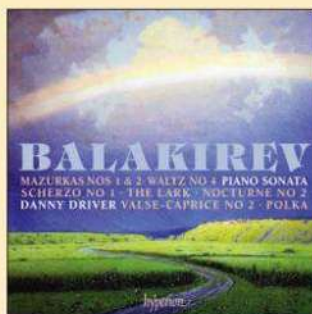


Compact Disc CDA67860

## BALAKIREV

### PIANO SONATA & OTHER WORKS

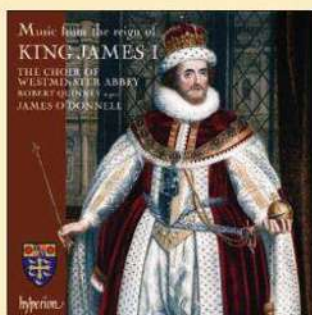
Pianist Danny Driver has garnered overwhelming critical praise for his previous discs for Hyperion. For his latest disc, he turns to one of the giants of the Russian piano world. Balakirev's Piano Sonata in B flat minor is a major achievement of the period. Its absence from the standard repertoire is unfortunate, as it is fully worthy of such a place. Undoubtedly this marvellous recording will provoke a reappraisal. DANNY DRIVER



Compact Disc CDA67806

## MUSIC FROM THE REIGN OF KING JAMES I

Westminster Abbey has been the focus of British royal occasions for centuries, and the early seventeenth century saw the most dazzling musicians of the age writing music for the Court in all its various incarnations. This fascinating disc presents a selection of works from the reign of King James I. THE CHOIR OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY  
ROBERT QUINNEY  
JAMES O'DONNELL



Compact Disc CDA67858



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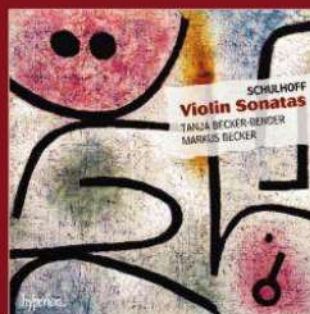
# hyperion



Compact Disc CDA67838

## THE ROMANTIC VIOLIN CONCERTO VOLUME 10: D'ERLANGER / CLIFFE

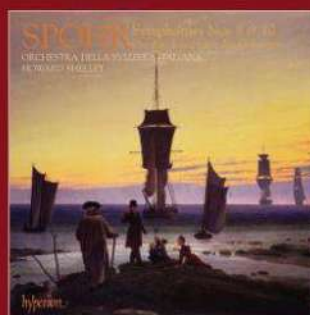
Hyperion's Romantic Violin Concerto series reaches its tenth volume, and turns to two composers based in England, and works which have lain hidden for decades. This disc provides a fascinating glimpse of musical history and the shifting fashions of the age which made fame such a fleeting thing for so many composers. PHILIPPE GRAFFIN / BBC NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF WALES  
DAVID LLOYD-JONES



Compact Disc CDA67833

## SCHULHOFF VIOLIN SONATAS

Tanja Becker-Bender appears here in a second disc for Hyperion with her compatriot, Markus Becker, who has made two acclaimed recordings for the label. Erwin Schulhoff: jazz enthusiast, sometime Dadaist, surrealist and committed communist. These are some of the labels that spring to mind for this extraordinary figure, but Schulhoff was a more complex and wide-ranging musician than any neat tags suggest. TANJA BECKER-BENDER  
MARKUS BECKER

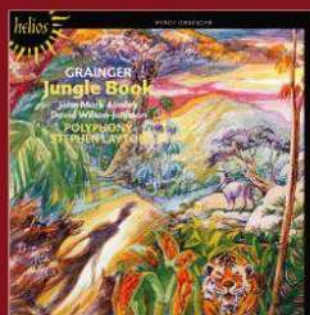


Compact Disc CDA67802

## SPOHR

### SYMPHONIES NOS 8 & 10

Howard Shelley's fascinating discs of Spohr's symphonies with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana have reignited interest in a composer who was once the most important in Europe, and particularly so in England, where he was worshipped by all of musical society. ORCHESTRA DELLA SVIZZERA ITALIANA  
HOWARD SHELLEY



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## GRAINGER JUNGLE BOOK

This reissue commemorates the 50th anniversary of Grainger's death in February 1961. 'Unquestionably an important and relishable release' (*Hi Fi News*) 'A capella singing at its very finest' (*Soundscape*, Australia) JOHN MARK AINSLEY  
DAVID WILSON-JOHNSON  
POLYPHONY / STEPHEN LAYTON



Compact Disc CDH55311 (budget price)



## ARENSKY PIANO MUSIC

'Intimately played and warmly recorded' (*BBC Music Magazine*) 'An enchanting and beautifully played recital' (*Hi-Fi News*) STEPHEN COOMBS

## GRECHANINOV VESPERS

'Numerous delights. The performance by the Holst Singers is stunningly good. This serene, delectable music is irresistible and so is its performance' (*Choir & Organ*) HOLST SINGERS / STEPHEN LAYTON



GRAMOPHONE

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103

**KEY TO SYMBOLS**

- R** Reissue
- H** Historic
- ②** Compact disc (number of discs in set)
- T** Text(s) included
- t** translation(s) included
- S** Synopsis included

- N** Notes included
- s** subtitles included
- SACD** SACD
- DVD** DVD audio
- DVD** DVD video
- Blu-ray** Blu-ray
- Download** Download
- VHS** VHS cassette

- nla** no longer available
- aas** all available separately
- oas** only available separately
- £11 and over** £11 and over
- £8 to £10.99** £8 to £10.99
- £6 to £7.99** £6 to £7.99
- £5.99 and below** £5.99 and below



**Editor's Choice**  
See page 12



**Gramophone recommends**



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featured recordings



# Orchestral

Andrew Davis's *The Planets* • Rattle revisits the *Resurrection* • Walton plays Walton

## JS Bach

Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin with

Raphael Alpermann *org*

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2064 (78' • DDD)

**A colourful and dramatic approach to Bach's kaleidoscopic mazes**



Choosing the means to realise what Forkel (Bach's first biographer) called "variations on a grand scale", the Akademie für Alte Musik take a bold if ultimately

geometric approach to uncover the kaleidoscopic mazes in these almost unfathomable fugues and canons. This is essentially an orchestral arrangement using the forces of, say, Bach's First Orchestral Suite, along with enriched reeds, and a soft-edged trombone to provide a *stile antico* gravitas. Chamber groups also emerge from within and a solo harpsichord appears intermittently.

The result is an unusually dramatic exploration of linear and textural variation, one curiously drawn from a tried-and-tested rhetorical stable – whether working within the *stylus phantasticus* of *Contrapunctus 5* or the symphonic "alla francese" of No 6 – and yet the fruity orchestral palette is decidedly a mathematical proof of the newest age: whether trombone doublings, sudden oboe band episodes or discrete solo string *canti fermi* appearing like shadowy satyrs, the incremental effect is both studied and often strikingly effective.

If the Akademie's opening movements provide scant sense of *expositio* (the bulgy and thrusting lines affording little expectancy), the triple fugue of *Contrapunctus 8* represents some new directions of elevated purpose: the figure picked up from the third fugue now seems estranged as the piece is transformed into a compelling essay of disorienting angst. Interpretative risk takes another turn for the better in the hushed whispers of *Contrapunctus 10* – a consummate four-part string "fancy" which both the Keller Quartet (ECM, 7/98) and Phantasm (Simax, 3/99) negotiate with a still wider poetic lens.

The impact of these largely irradiating landscapes from the Akademie ultimately represents a struggle to reconcile expressive release (which these febrile textures

encourage) with determinedly ingrained Baroque stylistic reflexes. *Contrapunctus 11* seems an especially incoherent mix in this respect. Consequently, for all the promises to be transported – however enterprising these colourful performances – the poetics of Bach's masterpiece remain tantalisingly elusive.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

## Barber

Essays for Orchestra – No 1, Op 12; No 2, Op 17; No 3, Op 47. Piano Concerto, Op 38<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Giampaolo Nuti *pf* RAI National

Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Kawka

Stradivarius © STR33814 (59' • DDD)

*Piano Concerto* – selected comparisons:

Browning, St Louis SO, Slatkin (11/91) (RCA) RD60732

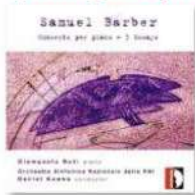
Parker, Atlanta SO, Levi (7/97) (TELA) CD80441

Browning, Cleveland Orch, Szell

(7/65<sup>a</sup>; 2/98<sup>a</sup>) (SONY) 88697 52989-2

Prutsmann, RSNO, Alsop (11/02) (NAXO) 8 559133

**A reliable Concerto but the three career-spanning Essays are an inspired coupling**



The two recordings of the Piano Concerto by John Browning are a distinctly hard act to follow. The first, in 1964, with the Cleveland Orchestra under Szell, has all the freshness and panache of a young pianist announcing a masterpiece with stunning conviction: the second, in 1991 with the St Louis Orchestra under Slatkin, still has the imprimatur of Barber's chosen exponent and topped my *Gramophone* Collection (4/01). There have been more recordings since, including Jon Kimura Parker and Stephen Prutsmann, but Nuti has a fine technique although neither the orchestra nor the recorded balance are up to the Americans.

The coupling of the three Essays, spanning Barber's entire career, is attractive. The First is a contemporary of the famous Adagio for strings – the two works were launched together under Toscanini in 1938 – and is equally elegiac. The Second, from the war years, is more grandiose, and the Third was written in Italy in 1978 and premiered that year by the New York Philharmonic under Mehta. This last Essay, with its sumptuous Straussian slower section, shows that Barber did not change. The year after that premiere he provocatively told Allan Kozinn: "There's no reason music should be difficult for the audience, is there?"

The performances are all reliable and the CD is a welcome centenary tribute from Italy to a composer who had so many rewarding connections with that country throughout his life. **Peter Dickinson**

## N Boulanger • Gershwin • Tansman

N Boulanger *Fantaisie* Gershwin *Rhapsody* in Blue Tansman *Piano Concerto* No 2

David Greilsammer *pf* Radio France

Philharmonic Orchestra / Steven Sloane

Naïve © V5224 (64' • DDD)

**The Rhapsody is hit-and-miss but the Tansman is revealed as a hidden gem**



After Alexandre Tansman performed his own Second Piano Concerto, George Gershwin embraced the pianist/composer backstage, called him a

genius, and launched a lifelong friendship. When, upon Ravel's recommendation, Gershwin asked Tansman's friend Nadia Boulanger for composition lessons in 1928, she turned him down, in fear that he'd risk spoiling a fully formed musical personality. That's the Tansman/Boulanger/Gershwin triangle in a nutshell, and the basis for this disc's programme.

One can hear why Tansman's concerto bowled Gershwin over. The work gushes with punchy orchestrations (especially in the brass and percussion departments), while the piano writing is built to sizzle and project like crazy across the footlights. Although one might superficially glean stylistic allusions to Ravel, early Prokofiev, Milhaud, Honegger and the like, some of the *Scherzo* and finale's antiphonal passages seem to foreshadow Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*. At the same time, the *Lento* touchingly demonstrates Tansman's gift for lyric simplicity.

Although Nadia Boulanger was far less known for her creative efforts than her pedagogy, the three-part *Fantaisie* certainly demonstrates the young composer's assured craft and ability to fashion orchestral textures that are richly varied and opulent without sounding thick. As you listen, don't be surprised if Franck, d'Indy, late Fauré and even traces of Reger come to mind.

Ferde Grofé's Whiteman Band orchestrations for Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*



inspire an appropriately loose-knit ensemble sensibility within the Radio France Philharmonic's members, especially in the first-desk solo licks. As for the solo piano part, Greilsammer hits and misses. Sometimes he's right on the idiomatic money (his first unaccompanied cadenza), other times he imposes push/pull *rubatos* and tapered phrases that have more to do with the interpretative gestures of generic Romantic piano music than the music's direct, forward impetus. In any event, pianist, conductor and orchestra make a compelling case for both the Tansman Second Concerto as a minor masterpiece well worth reviving, and the Boulanger *Fantaisie* as a fascinating glimpse into this justly revered teacher's "other life". **Jed Distler**

## Brahms

Symphony No 1, Op 68

Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra /

Simone Young

Oehms Classics (P) OC675 (50' • DDD/DSD)

Selected comparisons:

LPO, Alsop (3/05) (NAXO) 8 557428

Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer (12/09) (CHNN) CCSSA28309

**Powerful Brahms from Hamburg - at least until you consider the rival versions**



Initially, Simone Young's Hamburg Philharmonic Brahms First put me in mind of an earlier live recording from the same city, Furtwängler's massively stated 1951

broadcast with the North German Radio Orchestra...the opening at least, a heavy, slow-beating *Un poco sostenuto* that sets us up for a purposeful first movement. There can't be too many recent accounts that open as imposingly, the main *Allegro* holding its great weight without the least sign of strain, then subtly gaining momentum as the (infrequently played) repeat kicks in. "Powerful" is the word, and "adoring" the word for the *Andante* second movement, the strings weaving their sensual lines and drawing a parallel response from the woodwinds. The overall tempo is slow, and the *Allegretto* is pretty slow too, another convincing performance, though I would have welcomed greater clarity among the winds and strings after the intense Trio section. Young usefully divides her violin desks left and right of the rostrum, a real boon in the finale, especially at around 1'16" where the two desks intertwine. The finale carries real conviction in spite of occasionally blurred detail (the sonorous recording sometimes plays favourites among inner voices) and the work ends in a blaze of strings-dominated glory.

As to comparisons, Iván Fischer is less granitic than Young (though no less gripping), but leaner and stronger on detail, whereas Marin Alsop and the London Philharmonic, although less impressive

overall, offer a very well-judged performance. I also have a great deal of time for Bernstein's gloriously OTT Vienna Philharmonic recording (DG) and Wand's Munich Philharmonic version (Profil). As to the "Old Guard", Karajan in the early 1960s with the BPO (DG, 7/95) and, of course, that wonderful Hamburg performance under Furtwängler. That's the name of the game with this symphony – record it, and the rivals crowd around you, some of them mountain-high. But, taken on its own terms, this newcomer has much to offer. **Rob Cowan**

## Gregson

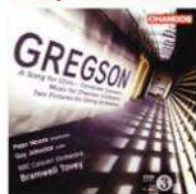
Music for Chamber Orchestra. Trombone Concerto<sup>a</sup>. A Song for Chris<sup>b</sup>. Two Pictures

<sup>a</sup>Peter Moore *trbn* <sup>b</sup>Guy Johnston *vc*

BBC Concert Orchestra / Bramwell Tovey

Chandos (P) CHAN10627 (70' • DDD)

**A concerto showcase for composer and soloists alike**



Edward Gregson, for 12 years Principal of the Royal Northern College of Music (1996-2008), is here represented by a sequence of works written between 1968

and 2009, all of them strong and beautifully crafted. Earliest is the *Music for Chamber Orchestra*, commissioned for the English Chamber Orchestra to play on a tour of South America under Daniel Barenboim. Sadly, Barenboim rejected the work, though it is now hard to see why. It is in effect a four-movement symphony for strings which effectively exploits substantial oboe and horn solos.

The rejection of that work led to Gregson's completely abandoning the idea of writing for orchestra, and he turned instead to writing for brass bands. When he next wrote for orchestra in the Trombone Concerto (1979), his extra skill bubbled over in a work full of fun, written originally for the first BBC Young Musician of the Year, Michael Hext, and here gloriously played with the abandon of youth by Peter Moore, still only 14 when in 2008 he, too, became the Young Musician of the Year. The range of effects Gregson conceives on the trombone, no doubt thanks to his experience writing for brass bands, is breathtaking as played by Moore. In a single movement lasting just over 15 minutes, the work ranges wide with a cadenza which brings in spectacular sliding *glissandos* as well as flutter-tonguing. The final section has a jolly marching theme leading to a rousing conclusion. If anyone wants to sample Gregson's music, this is the first work I would suggest.

The most recent work here, *Two Pictures*, dates from 2009. The first is slow and reflective, the second fast and brilliant, and, as in the Trombone Concerto, Gregson

makes prominent use of the clatter of Chinese blocks. The final work, *A Song for Chris*, is a cello concerto written for Christopher Rowland, and here beautifully played by Guy Johnston. There are four compact sections, lasting in all 18 minutes, with distant echoes of Shostakovich which hardly detract from the distinctiveness of Gregson's writing. A splendid showcase not only for the composer and the two excellent soloists but also the BBC Concert Orchestra, excelling itself under Canadian conductor Bramwell Tovey. Brilliant, cleanly focused Chandos sound, too.

**Edward Greenfield**

## Handel

Water Music, HWV348-50.

Rodrigo – Overture and Suite

Les Musiciens du Louvre-Grenoble /

Marc Minkowski

Naïve (P) V5234 (68' • DDD)

**Suite sounds pour forth in a performance of verve and vigour**



Handel's celebrated music for George I's barge party down the Thames from Whitehall Stairs to Chelsea has been traditionally arranged into three

suites. However, the earliest known manuscript copy, dating from 1718 (found in the archive of the Royal Society of Musicians in 2004), contains all of the movements in only one long suite – confirming a suspicion that scholars entertained for some time that the three-suite structure is not an authentic indication of what was performed on July 17, 1717. Despite acknowledging this correct historical information, Ivan A Alexandre's booklet-note justifies Marc Minkowski's retention of the three-suite arrangement on the grounds of dramatic structure and pacing of musical material. I'm not persuaded by the argument; and the artistic viability of the single-suite theory has been advocated effectively in superb recordings by Tafelmusik (Sony, 7/96<sup>R</sup>) and L'Arte dell'Arco (CPO, 11/08). However, adherence to the customary three-suite form does little harm to the world, and there is no hint of complacency or perfunctory over-reverence in the playing of Les Musiciens du Louvre.

Minkowski's interpretation has plenty of tautness and verve (at its frequent best) or breathless abrasiveness (at its occasional worst); the vigour and force of quick movements can be dashing (in both senses of the term), but a lack of sophisticated charm in animated passages undermines the appeal of Minkowski's concentrated "dramatic" snappiness (eg the first appearance of the braying horns), and sometimes one yearns for more convivial airiness and a more polished blend from the strings. Passages for horns and oboes have



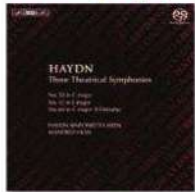
## Orchestral reviews

punchy impact in the *Allegro* of the “Suite in F” (although rhythmical pulse is too loose for my taste), whereas the ensuing *Air* is more cautious than usual. The trumpets play with incisive attack during the *Alla Hornpipe* of the “Suite in D”, although the *Lentement* is pedantically lugubrious and the ridiculous rushing of the concluding *Bourée* evokes an image of Speedy Gonzales. The most enduring music-making is the slower or gentler movements of the “Suite in G”, with Minkowski embracing the lyrical sustained lines wholeheartedly and with emotional warmth (eg the flutes in the first part, or the gracefully lilting country dance, replete with jovial bassoons). The disc is rounded off by a spirited performance of the overture and suite from *Rodrigo*. Paid-up fans of Minkowski will find plenty to enjoy here but critical observers won't be convinced by everything. **David Vickers**

## Haydn

‘Three Theatrical Symphonies’  
Symphonies – No 12; No 50; No 60, ‘Il Distratto’  
**Haydn Sinfonietta Wien / Manfred Huss**  
BIS (P) BIS-SACD1815 (66' • DDD/DSD)

**Huss finds the fun and fantasy in Haydn's endlessly enjoyable symphonies**



The Haydn year in 2009 may have opened the ears of many to some of the hidden gems of the composer's output and few have done more to this end than Manfred

Huss. So hats off to him, his Haydn Sinfonietta and BIS Records for continuing the good fight with this disc of three theatrical symphonies, at least two of which might not often be afforded an airing outside a complete cycle.

The best-known of this group of symphonies is No 60, composed in 1774 “per la Commedia intitolata il Distratto”. The music's “distractions” – trademarks of Haydn's style – include fanfare interruptions, motifs that mither around a single chord before being nudged back into reality, rapid changes of mood and, most famously, the orchestra quite forgetting where it is in the finale, retuning, and then carrying on. The six-movement work is assuredly one of Haydn's oddest; Huss and the HSW major more on its nervous energy than the whimsicality Harnoncourt underlines with the *Concentus Musicus* (WCJ, 12/90<sup>®</sup>).

Symphony No 50 started life in 1773 as the prelude to a marionette opera, and found its symphonic form when Haydn added a minuet and finale. No 12 comes from a full decade earlier and was presumably conceived as the opening and incidental music to *Acide*, in which form it has already been recorded by these musicians (8/09). *Galant* gestures take primacy over sustained motivic argument but it nevertheless contains shades of nascent *Sturm und Drang* and provides a piquant

E major cushion between the two more thrusting C major works. The coupling is unique, the programming considered and the project a delightful success. **David Thresher**

## Hindemith

Kammermusik No 5, Op 36 No 4.  
Konzertmusik, Op 48. Der  
Schwanendreher. Trauermusik  
**Lawrence Power** *vs* BBC Scottish  
Symphony Orchestra / David Atherton  
Hyperion (P) CDA67774 (73' • DDD)

*Selected comparisons:*

Schmidt, Bavarian Rad SO, Heger, Kubelik

(6/88) (KOCH) 310045 (without Trauermusik)

Cortese, Philb Orch, Brabbins (9/95) (ASV) CDDCA931

Dean, Queensland SO, Albert (CPO) CPO999 492-2

*Der Schwanendreher* – selected comparison:

Waltber, San Francisco SO, Blomstedt (DECC) 433 809-2DH

*Kammermusik No 5* – selected comparisons:

Kashkashian, Concertgebouw Orch, Chailly

(11/92) (DECC) 433 816-2DH2

Doktor, Conc Amsterdam (TELDE) 2564 69581-0

**A superbly engineered disc which focuses on Hindemith's viola concertos**



Despite their varying titles and formats, the larger works here constitute Hindemith's viola concertos Nos 1-3.

*Kammermusik* No 5 (1927), still audibly a product of the *enfant terrible* of the early 1920s, already begins to hint at the later composer's formal rigour, a conjunction of extremes carried further in the second of Hindemith's much less well-known *Konzertmusiken*, scored for viola and large chamber orchestra (1930; the others comprise a suite for large wind band, a piano concerto with brass and harps and the diptych for strings and brass composed for the Boston Symphony's 50th anniversary). In *The Swan-turmer* (1935), Hindemith's mature style – first heard in *Das Unaufhörliche* (1931) and writ large through *Mathis der Maler* (symphony and opera) – is fully realised.

Collections of the concertos (with or without *Trauermusik* of 1936) have been few and far between. Hyperion wisely avoids a chronological sequence, placing *Konzertmusik* first and *Kammermusik* last. Power's affinity with Hindemith's music is as evident in these new recordings as in previous instalments, his tone perfectly balanced between strength and delicacy, avoiding Cortese's over-burnished sound, his being until now the finest collection and penetrating deeper to the music's core than either Dean or Schmidt's now ancient-sounding renditions on Koch Schwann. Hyperion's beautifully natural recording is the best yet but it is the partnership with Atherton and the BBC Scottish that makes this such a rewarding listen; their performance of *Kammermusik* No 5 more than stands

comparison with the best of the competition – Doktor and Kashkashian – and is swifter, too. *Der Schwanendreher* and the *Konzertmusik* really come alive and the icing is a touching *Trauermusik* which sounds like a newly discovered work. The new market leader, strongly recommended. Now, how about the viola d'amore works on Volume 4? **Guy Rickards**

## Holst

‘Orchestral Works, Vol 2’

The Planets, Op 32<sup>1</sup>. Japanese Suite, Op 33.

Beni Mora, Op 29 No 1

<sup>2</sup>Manchester Chamber Choir;

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis  
Chandos (P) CHSA5086 (78' • DDD/DSD)

**A tasteful Planets – but how does it compete in an impossibly crowded field?**



Vol 2 in Chandos's Holst series finds Sir Andrew Davis stepping into the breach left by Richard Hickox's death.

Certainly, as regards orchestral expertise,

sound quality and ample measure, there's little with which to quibble. Interpretation-wise, things are somewhat more variable, leaving me wondering whether Davis is as innate a Holstian as he is an Elgarian.

This is Davis's third recording of *The Planets*, and his approach has changed little since his last account with the BBC SO (Teldec, 12/94), presiding as he does over an eminently sane, refreshingly unsensational display. Does “Mars” bare its teeth with sufficient menace? I don't think so, though Davis is to be applauded for not allowing the music to subside into a gratuitous din. “Venus” has a translucent, cool beauty and “Mercury” both bounce and bite. The ebullient “Jupiter”, however, refuses to catch fire, its familiar tune too staid for my own liking. As before, “Saturn” stands out for its remorseless tread, ominously tangible tubular bells and magnificently built climax, while “Uranus” now has a greater sense of gleeful mischief (those startled winds at 3'06" will make you smile). The latter's unnervingly bleak coda and first half of “Neptune” are also perceptively handled but the contribution of the choir lacks ethereal allure. Davis's previous effort also set the highest of benchmarks for a sonic point of view, with a breathtakingly natural sense of perspective, stunning range and definition not quite matched by this otherwise mightily impressive Chandos production. So, when all's said and done, I'd be reluctant to rank this new version alongside a host of distinguished recordings from the likes of Boult (the first of his five, from 1945 with the BBC SO, remains my own touchstone), Sargent (CfP), Previn (EMI), Handley (Alto), Steinberg (DG), Dutoit (Decca) and Elder (Hyperion).

It's fun detecting glimpses of the main offering in the “Oriental Suite” from 1909-10,



Rattle: reluctant to make 'ugly' sounds



# Rattle's RESURRECTION

Beauty of sound comes alive in the hands of the Berlin Philharmonic

## Mahler

Symphony No 2, 'Resurrection'

Kate Royal *sop* Magdalena Kožená *mez*  
Berlin Radio Choir; Berlin Philharmonic  
Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle  
EMI ② 647363-2 (86' • DDD)

Selected comparison:

Auger, Baker, CBSO, Rattle (12/87<sup>th</sup>) (EMI) 345794-2

Milne, Rennert, Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer

(4/06) (CHNN) CCSSA23506

Kenny, Van Nes, LPO, Tennstedt (LPO) LPO0044



The first movement was something of a sticking-point in Rattle's CBSO recording of the piece and it's still after all these years a bone of contention – only here it's the well-upholstered Berlin Philharmonic strings that sound the first unconvincing notes. Even that naked *tremolando* at the outset has what can only be described as a "covered" sound such as might be deployed by a singer of the old school. The shuddering declamations from cellos and basses are similarly devoid of that rosiny edge. And though this might be a by-product of EMI's handsome Philharmonic recording keeping its distance, the circumspection and low-tension plod of the opening paragraph most certainly isn't.

With the first appearance of the second subject the Berliners' famed *sostenuto* comes

into its own, with Rattle's pronounced *rubato* perhaps over-accentuating the keening harmony – but the theme's return, shyly emerging from the mists of time, is very beautiful, with voluptuous cor anglais again pointing to the BPO's exceptional pedigree. But this is an orchestra so reluctant to make an ugly sound that perhaps what I miss most of all at the dramatic extremes of this movement is the coruscating effect of shrill, demented woodwinds and the brassy penetration of trumpets and trombones. Time and again the *tutti* sound strikes me as too blended.

The pacing, too, feels overly expansive despite Rattle's meticulous adherence to Mahler's frequent and often extreme tempo fluctuations. Certainly we've come a long way from Otto Klemperer's celebrated EMI studio recording in which he systematically disregarded all such indications as if he were still conducting *Todtenfeier*, the first incarnation of the movement where none of these markings exist. One might include in that assessment the unmarked but traditional *ritardando* into the battering dissonance at the climax of the development. Rattle makes a meal of that. But surely it's more shocking *not* to signal the arrival of the *molto pesante*? Isn't that the reason Mahler pointedly avoided suggesting any slackening of pace in the moments before this shattering derailment?

The life-in-retrospect inner movements bring playing of exquisite tone and quick

reflexes, with Rattle making much of the headlong panic which snaps us out of rosy reverie in the second movement. Again, in the Trio of the third movement, the trumpets are too blended for my taste, the "barbershop" harmony not cheesy enough to convey that old rustic charm. And when the quirky little ditty goes cosmic at the climax I just wanted more definition of trumpets and horns spinning the movement off its axis.

Magdalena Kožená brings her customary depth of feeling to the still maternal voice of "Urlicht" (though one or two switches of register evidence some discomfort); and notwithstanding moments where I would like the veneer stripped off the brass (especially the first trumpet), the finale – with magical spatial effects – is magnificent. Rattle's famous *piano-pianissimos* are deployed to breathtaking effect, the choral passages (radiantly illuminated at the top by Kate Royal) sound pure, mysterious and very Bachian, and the returning resurrection hymn is tremendous.

There is still no completely ideal recording of this inspiring piece: if we could somehow conjure an amalgam of Rattle, Fischer, Bernstein and Tennstedt we'd be getting close. I personally am drawn back to Iván Fischer, while the recent live Tennstedt lays bare the whole burning issue of mortality with uncompromising force. If he is the Beast, then Rattle is undoubtedly Beauty. If only we could bring them together.

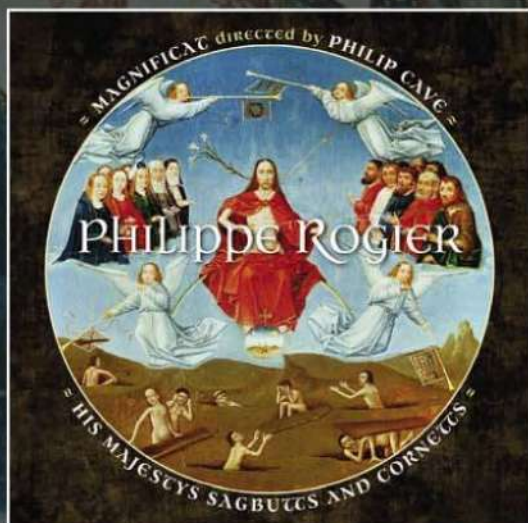
Edward Seckerson



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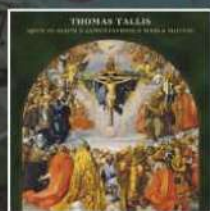


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*Beni Mora* (listen out for “Venus” emerging from around 2’10” into its diaphanous central *Allegretto*). In the opening dance, Davis’s conducting doesn’t always spark the imagination like Sargent’s (CfP), Boult’s (Lyrita) or Lloyd-Jones’s (Naxos), though he makes amends with a tangily flavoured performance of the hypnotically insistent finale. Completed while Holst was still at work on *The Planets*, the *Japanese Suite* (1915) serves up a rather less potent brew, its themes apparently whistled to the composer by the dancer Michio Ito (who requested it in the first place); here, at least, Davis and the BBC PO have the edge over Boult and the LSO on Lyrita.

Andrew Achenbach

## Mahler

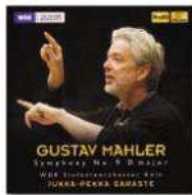
Symphony No 9

WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne /

Jukka-Pekka Saraste

Profil © PH10035 (80’ • DDD)

**Instinct and intellect combine perfectly in Jukka-Pekka Saraste’s perceptive reading**



Mahler is all about weighing and balancing the extremes – heart and intellect, tempo and dynamics, tension and release – and Saraste’s judgement in such

matters is sharp and instinctive. The combination of a forensic ear and a big heart is not just desirable but de rigueur in Mahler and, listening to Saraste lay down the uninhabitable opening measures of this impressive reading, my very first note was to register just how welcoming the second violins sounded as they tendered the hopeful first subject. My second concerned the hugely expressive cor anglais solo (just three notes) at last persuading the first violins to draw the entire string section into this poignant song without words.

Saraste’s acute sense of the music’s flux throughout this first movement makes for a series of frenzied climaxes, the first opening a gaping wound in unison clarinets before stopped horns and reptilian bass clarinet lead us deeper into the unknown. Saraste creates great atmosphere in these “lost” moments, time and pulse suspended like an out-of-body experience. Impressive horn playing makes the open-to-stopped colour particularly unsettling and the balmy transition into the coda deeply reassuring. Nothing could be further removed from the unforgiving glare of Salonen’s recent account (Signum, 9/10). With Saraste there is always hope.

The inner movements kick in with a suitably lumpen Ländler, deliciously wonky horn trills suggesting the dodgy footwork of the uncouth putting on airs. The fast waltz abandons all pretence and draws us all in to an exhilarating knees-up. The Rondo-Burleske is exhilarating, too – biting and quick of reflex – but shows its

teeth in the cruel E flat clarinet parody of the poignant middle section, foreshadowing as it does the great finale.

And it is here that Saraste and his excellent WDR Symphony Orchestra convey an almost startling defiance, with violins digging deep to convey a truly Bernsteinian full-throatedness. This burgeoning hymn has cantorial roots, make no mistake. But it’s the tension between defiance and resignation that really shows Saraste’s perception and understanding. Mahler’s life passes before him in aching slow motion – not literally, as with Bernstein, but through the delicate balance of what is outwardly said and inwardly felt.

Edward Seckerson

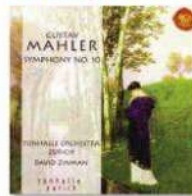
## Mahler

Symphony No 10 (compl Clinton Carpenter)

Zürich Tonhalle Orchestra / David Zinman

RCA Red Seal © 88697 76896-2 (79’ • DDD)

**A radical departure for Zinman – but is this Carpenter completion overcooked?**



Unsuspecting purchasers are in for a surprise. No arranger is cited on the front of the booklet but the performing edition used is that by Clinton Carpenter. For a

conductor previously associated with stripped-down Beethoven, pellucid Strauss and the kind of Mahler that sticks to the evidence on the page, David Zinman is possibly the last musician in the world one would have expected to take up this Mahler Tenth. Here inauthentic (ie purely speculative) infilling, of the kind so studiously avoided by Deryck Cooke et al, is embraced to conjure a thicker-textured would-be authentic sound world. In conversation with Philip Clark and Anthony Payne in *Gramophone*’s May 2008 issue, Colin Matthews had no hesitation in condemning such realisations as “amateur and wrong-headed. For instance, there’s the ludicrous Clinton Carpenter version where he brings in themes from other symphonies to plug gaps... This is just not the way composers work”.

While less ubiquitous than Cooke, the Carpenter score has its champions. Hot off the press comes a DVD from Lan Shui’s Singapore Symphony Orchestra on Avie, and there’s a finely recorded CD from Andrew Litton in Dallas (Delos, 4/03). Even without the SACD encoding available in the Far East, Zinman and his sound team expose some additional inner detail in the atmospheric Zürich acoustic, and the interpretation, always sensibly paced, can sound less radically overstuffed.

How to sum up? A rum do I’d say – the finale’s emotive flute theme is patently trashed (first sentimentalised, then coarsened) – yet should the whole project not strike you as an aesthetic faux pas there could be much to enjoy. **David Gutman**

## Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 22, K482; No 25, K503

David Fray pf

Philharmonia Orchestra / Jaap van Zweden

Virgin Classics © 641964-0 (66’ • DDD)

**Artistry, eloquence and grandeur – but it doesn’t quite come together yet**



Mozart’s E flat major Concerto, K482, has been popular just lately; this is the fourth recording of it to come my way in the past year. It deserves

to be, too, for it is a work of effortless Mozartian regality and range, and I have been grateful to recent discs from David Greilsammer (Naïve, 2/10) and Daniel Barenboim with Rafael Kubelík (BR-Klassik, 9/10, a 1970 radio recording rescued from the archives) for reminding me of its greatness. I do not feel that David Fray has quite got to the heart of it here, however. He certainly sounds like a player with the equipment to do so – his touch can be exquisitely delicate, he can generate impressive grandeur when required, and there are some very successful transitions between the two. Yet there are also places where his tone is worryingly hard and aggressive. He must mean it, so what, for instance, makes him want to bang out the final rondo’s first episode so?

Such playing undoubtedly suits the opulence of K503 better, and indeed this is generally a more successful performance, particularly in the excitement and brilliance of a well-contoured finale. Fray’s fine touch is on display again in the slow movement, but if (as I do) you dislike the fussy articulation of the first movement’s main theme you will be in for an irritating time there.

In both concertos the Philharmonia under Jaap van Zweden provide a cushiony background, nice in itself but lacking something in incisiveness, agility and in places sheer presence; the woodwind surely need to be able to contribute more warmth to the *Andante* of K482. But then at no stage did I detect a massive rapport between soloist and orchestra, any more than I did in Fray’s recent self-directed Bach concertos (4/09). This is an artist with ability and ideas all right, but they are not quite clicking yet.

Lindsay Kemp

## Pierné

Marche des petits soldats de plomb.

Ramuntcho – Suites Nos 1 & 2. Piano

Concerto, Op 12<sup>1</sup>. Divertissements sur un thème pastoral

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet pf

BBC Philharmonia Orchestra / Juanjo Mena

Chandos © CHAN10633 (67’ • DDD)





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(Violin),  
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(Cello)  
  
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WiHan Quartet



### Orchestral charm and craftsmanship revealed in a fine Philharmonic recital



Following on from Laurent Wagschal's recent disc of Pierné's piano music (Timpani, 2/11, including the sombre and magnificent Variations, for Cortot a major contribution to French keyboard literature), Chandos now issues an orchestral recital of the highest quality, a reminder of charm and craftsmanship too long neglected. The *Marche des petits soldats de plomb* makes an enchantingly light-hearted curtain-raiser with its mischievous elfin fade-out, while the *Divertissements sur un thème pastoral* (a gift for the Orchestre Colonne) offers Juanjo Mena and the BBC Philharmonic an opportunity to perform one elegant and stylish variation after another with a thrilling brilliance and engagement. The two *Ramuntcho* Suites turn to Pierre Loti's 1897 novel for inspiration. Set in the French Basque country, they are programme music par excellence, with much local colouring including a Fandango and *Rapsodie Basque*.

However, pride of place must surely go to the Piano Concerto, clearly inspired by Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto, though with a scintillating character of its own. Only a puritan could resist the second-movement *Scherzando*, where a jaunty theme is sent spinning through a maze of sparkling Christmas-tree elaboration. There is alternating grandeur and frivolity in the finale which Bavouzet (fresh from triumphs in his Bartók and Ravel concerto recordings) plays with an enthralling virtuosity. Here and elsewhere he makes it difficult to imagine a more bright-eyed and eloquent soloist, and his partners work with him hand-in-glove. For all those who delight in a wholly French grace and magic, this disc is a winner, and it is superbly recorded. **Bryce Morrison**

### Respighi

Fontane di Roma. Pini di Roma. Feste romane  
São Paulo Symphony Orchestra /  
John Neschling

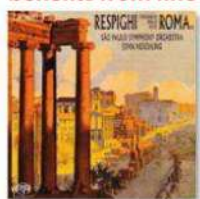
BIS (F) BIS-SACD1720 (64' • DDD/DSD)

Selected comparisons:

Philadelphia Orch, Ormandy (2/91<sup>8</sup>) (RCA) SBK48267

Philb Orch, Tortelier (4/92<sup>8</sup>) (CHAN) CHAN10035

**Respighi's Roman spectacular benefits from fine SACD sound**



It is good to welcome a South American orchestra in a recording and performance as rich and spectacular as this. It may seem bold of BIS to rely on a relatively untried orchestra and its Brazilian conductor but such confidence has amply paid off. *The Fountains of Rome*

(1915-16) was the work which first established Respighi as a master of orchestration. Yet it was only when Toscanini, a lifelong admirer of the composer, took the work up in 1918 that its qualities came to be fully realised. Designedly, it is a musical picture postcard, with each of the four linked sections warmly evocative in describing first the fountains of the Valle Giulia at dawn, of the Tritone at midday, of the Trevi in the afternoon and of the Villa Medici at sunset.

The spectacular BIS recording in SACD brings out all the atmospheric qualities, as it does in the second and most popular work of the Trilogy, *The Pines of Rome* (1924). The opening movement, "The Pines of the Villa Borghese", opens gloriously with a shimmering from the full orchestra, while the third of the four sections, "The Pines of the Janiculum", introduces what was regarded as radical at the time, the sound of a nightingale singing, originally on an old 78rpm disc. The recording now is much more faithful, though on this disc the sound is too distant to make its full mark. The final section, "The Pines of the Appian Way", involves heavy brass in illustrating the tramp of Roman legions.

The final work of the Trilogy, *Roman Festivals* (1928), is at once the longest, most ambitious yet least inspired of the three. Even so, in a brilliant performance such as this one, helped by spectacular sound, it is highly enjoyable. The first section illustrates gladiatorial combat in the Roman Circus, and the final section brings a riot of sound in "La Befana" ("The Epiphany"), with clashing rhythms one against the other, and with even a hint of a tarantella. It makes a splendid conclusion to a highly enjoyable disc.

From the days of LP even so fine a version of all three sections as that from Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra cannot compete against the claims of the finest of modern digital versions, as presented here, though Yan-Pascal Tortelier's Chandos version is on balance even finer, if not on SACD.

**Edward Greenfield**

### Schumann

Piano Concerto, Op 54. Concerto Movement in D minor. Abegg-Variations for Piano and Orchestra. Introduction and Allegro appassionato, Op 92. Concerto Allegro with Introduction, Op 134

Florian Uhlig p/ German Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Saarbrücken and Kaiserslautern / Christoph Poppen

Hänssler Classic (F) CD93 264 (75' • DDD)

Opp 54, 92 & 134 – selected comparison:

Marsbeiz, South Jutland SO, Zivka  
(2/11) (DANA) DACOD688

Opp 54, 92 & 134, Conc Movt – selected comparison:

Vinocour, ORF Vienna Rad SO, Wildner  
(9/10) (RCA) 88697 65877-2

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## Orchestral reviews

### Worthwhile advocacy for Schumann's experiments in concerto forms



The Piano Concerto is the draw here but it is the shorter pieces that are most interesting. Effectively, this single disc gathers together Schumann's viable piano-orchestral works and offers a conspectus of his experiments in search of new forms for the concerto. The Concerto itself is ubiquitous and needs no special pleading but the Introduction and Allegro appassionato and the Concerto Allegro with Introduction (aka the Introduction and Allegro concertante) are far less well known, and quite undeservedly so. Presumably only their dimensions – both are around the quarter-hour mark – make them difficult to programme in concert, although this need not be the case, as triumphantly demonstrated by Finghin Collins at the Proms last year.

The D minor Concerto Movement was an early, aborted but instructive attempt at a concerto (here, as on Vinocour's set, reconstructed by Jozef De Beenhouwer) and suffers somewhat from prolixity and a lack of memorable ideas. Opp 92 and 134 are not similarly afflicted. This music is by no means of inferior quality to the Concerto proper and it's worthwhile remembering that Op 54 itself remained a single-movement *Phantasie* for some time. Had it continued to do so, perhaps its fate in the repertoire would have been no better than that of its later siblings. As to the performances, they are more thoughtful than Marshev (whose disc also includes Clara's F minor Concerto Movement) and more dynamic than Vinocour. The recently merged German broadcasting orchestra is supportive if undistinguished. It may be invidious to compare Uhlig's Concerto with countless great recordings of the past but his advocacy of the shorter works is more than welcome and augurs well as his Schumann survey continues.

David Threasher

### Shostakovich

Symphonies – No 2, 'To October', Op 14; No 11, 'The Year 1905', Op 103

Mariinsky Chorus and Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Mariinsky 5 MAR0507 (76' • DDD/DSD • T/D)

**Symphonies singing of socialist realism with flair and drive**



Valery Gergiev's unqualified success in revivifying the masterworks of Russian and Soviet Russian music theatre is not always matched by his achievements in comparable symphonic repertoire. That said, his own-label Mariinsky

Shostakovich symphony series gets into its stride with this latest instalment, an odd pairing but one the maestro has favoured in concert. The Second Symphony (1927) fares best, its mostly modernistic idiom not a million miles away from that of the opera *The Nose*, of which the team have made an excellent recording (8/09). Experimental sonorities, lucidly rendered here, lead unexpectedly to a choral section extolling Lenin, October and the brotherhood of the proletariat.

Tub-thumping in a different vein, the Eleventh (1957) is Shostakovich at his most conservative and cinematic, the deployment of revolutionary songs embedding emotional memories superficially in line with the regime's subsequently expounded ideology of socialist realism in cultural production. Favouring quick-fire tempi, occasionally too fast for clear articulation, Gergiev avoids getting bogged down in dutiful note-spinning, perhaps tending to undersell the big, graphic moments that may or may not convey subversive intent. Climaxes are not necessarily balanced with an eye to textural clarity and the ambivalent oscillation of the bells at the close lacks precision. Mstislav Rostropovich in 2002 (LSO Live, 9/02) keeps the final bell and tam-tam strokes ringing on and on. The new disc has one point in common with that extraordinary marathon (uncoupled since it extends the work's playing time to more than 72 minutes): it needs to be played loud or not at all. While the score has more terror and more warmth than Gergiev reveals, admirers will find plenty of compensating flair and drive. The sound is vivid and the booklet includes performer listings, sung texts and translations.

David Gutman

### Sibelius

Symphonies – No 4, Op 63; No 5, Op 82

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra / Pietari Inkinen

Naxos 8 572227 (69' • DDD)

**A cool, restrained approach to Sibelius from the latest young Finnish conductor**



As the principal exporter of a steady stream of distinguished conductors, Finland has much to be proud of. The wonder is that each of these nascent stars makes music in such different ways. Rather than forcibly wrenching Sibelius from his moorings in the Romantic tradition in the manner of Osmo Vänskä, Pietari Inkinen proves a relatively cool, self-effacing guide, eschewing originality for its own sake in the pursuit of sweet-tempered naturalness. You would never guess that this refined, rather intimate interpretation of the Fourth is the product of a 30-year-old. With generally

spacious tempi preferred, albeit not as leisurely as Vänskä's in the slow movement, it is the restraint that impresses most. The massed strings can make a surprisingly warm, consoling sound when required, coached no doubt by Inkinen the skilled violinist. Showcasing his ability to elicit taut, expressive playing at low volume levels, the finale is treated more subjectively, spontaneous and fresh from start to finish, the ping of the glockenspiel preferred to the more intrusive alternative sonority of tubular bells.

The public rhetoric of the Fifth in its definitive form seems to appeal rather less to the conductor and exposes some technical shortcomings too. It's difficult to tell whether skewed balances such as the reticence of the brass at the big climax of the portmanteau first movement, or the recessed sponginess of the timps where it matters most towards its end, represent anti-bombastic interpretative preferences or are simply the result of glitches at the mixing desk. If you're looking for jagged rhythms hacked out of granite in the final peroration, Inkinen isn't your man. However, for the subtler cohesiveness of his approach and the generally keen response of his players, you might want to overlook the woolliness in the bass. The sound is otherwise attractive and Inkinen makes the music sound as though it's playing itself. The price is right.

David Gutman

### Spohr

Symphonies – No 8, Op 137; No 10, Op 156  
WoO8. Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten,  
WoO50 – Overture

Svizzera Italiana Orchestra / Howard Shelley  
Hyperion 6 CDA67802 (68' • DDD)

**The Romantic sensationalist turned back to older styles for his later symphonies**



Howard Shelley's cycle of Spohr's symphonies here reaches Nos 8 and 10, which both suggest a turn back to 18th-century certainties after some more experimental works. The Philharmonic Society of London was apparently a little disappointed by the less extravagant Spohr but No 8 is pleasant enough, with an attractive *Adagio* in a vein of gentle melancholy rather than tragedy and a lively *Scherzo* that includes an obbligate for a virtuoso violin. Perhaps this is in allusion to Spohr's own skills, so much admired by the English, and it is deftly played here by the orchestra's leader, Anthony Flint.

Spohr himself was dissatisfied with his Tenth and last symphony and withdrew it after one rehearsal; but his wife, Marianne Pfeiffer, loyally preserved the score, unperformed apart from the private run-through, and unpublished until it came to rest





# The WALTONS

Jamie tackles William's greatly underrated Cello Concerto

## Shostakovich • Walton

**Shostakovich** Cello Concerto No 1, Op 107

**Walton** Cello Concerto

Jamie Walton *tr*

Philharmonia Orchestra / Alex Briger

Signum © SIGCD220 (56' • DDD)



Cellist Jamie Walton offers William Walton's Concerto with an exceptional bonus: as well as playing the original 1956 version with its

original ending as a supplement, he records the 1975 revision. The difference between the two versions is limited to the coda of the finale; but on balance the slightly more extended 1975 version makes a more satisfying conclusion after the strong contrasts of the somewhat idiosyncratic finale's set of variations with their all-too-brief bursts of *allegro*.

The concerto was commissioned by Gregor Piatigorsky, who gave the first performance. Much as he liked the work, he always bemoaned the fact that it closed reflectively on a gentle *pianissimo*. He envisaged a loud ending like the one which Walton wrote for Heifetz in the Violin Concerto of 1938-39, which would readily prompt an ovation. Many years later in 1975 Walton agreed to do a revision but even then Piatigorsky was disappointed, when after a

*crescendo* in the coda and some emphatic chords, the work again ended quietly.

The elegiac quality in the work very much suits Jamie Walton's style, with his sweet, smooth cello tone, but he is also capable of powerfully attacking the vigorous writing, as in the central *Allegro* with its sharp syncopations. Alexander Briger is a most sympathetic accompanist, and though the balance favours the soloist, the clarity of Walton's often brilliant orchestration is beautifully brought out.

Shostakovich's First Concerto makes a generous and welcome coupling. Even though Jamie Walton cannot match the sheer power of the inspirer of the work, Mstislav Rostropovich, it is a most

compelling performance, very strong rhythmically, with the Philharmonia's first horn relishing what amounts to a *concertante* role in the first two movements.

Again Jamie Walton exquisitely brings out the haunting beauty of the main theme in the slow movement, and produces eerily chilling tone when that main theme is recapitulated on high harmonics. In the third movement, an extended cadenza, Walton builds up the argument powerfully, leading into the violence of the finale. A most valuable and enjoyable disc, adding impressively to the series Jamie Walton has recorded for Signum, which already includes Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto (1/09). **Edward Greenfield**

## INTERVIEW

### Jamie Walton

This is the third and final disc in my series pairing English and Russian cello works (the previous two discs paired the Britten Cello Symphony with Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto and Elgar's Concerto with Myaskovsky's). Walton's Cello Concerto is something that came late to me, but I'd always championed the Elgar and Britten works. I didn't understand the essence of the Walton for a long time, which is why I have recorded it last. But as soon as I started playing the music I completely fell in love with it. Walton is an incredibly underrated composer and this concerto is exceptionally well written for the instrument. Serendipitously, Oxford

University Press contacted me about three weeks before the recording sessions to say that there was an alternative ending to the concerto that had never been recorded, so we leapt at the opportunity. They sent over the parts and we just played it on the day. It was very exciting. The new finale has a dynamic power that was missing from the original ending, which is so mild. I think the grandeur makes a huge difference to the piece as a whole.

When I play frequently recorded works, I always try to keep my interpretations very pure and avoid self-indulgence. I just aim to play the music as it stands while being authentic to how I feel about the music. **Interview by James McCarthy**



## Orchestral reviews

in the Prussian State Library. One can see why Spohr was uncertain about it but there are attractive and characteristic touches, and there is something affecting about how the old Romantic sensationalist turned at the end for sustenance back to Haydn.

The recording is clear and lucid, and does justice to the excellent Overture to *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*, Spohr's third opera but the first he acknowledged. Based on a somewhat forced tale about a disguised heroine about to meet her lover in mortal combat, it begins in sombre vein but, as a jolly major-key transformation reassures listeners before curtain-rise, all will end well.

John Warrack

### Vivaldi

Flute Concertos – RV427; 'Il Gardellino', Op 10 No 3 RV428 – II; RV429; RV430; RV432; Op 10 No 5 RV434; Op 10 No 4 RV435; RV436; RV438; RV440

Arte Dei Suonatori / Alexis Kossenko fl

Alpha © ALPHA174 (77' • DDD)

**Flute concertos that show there's more to Vivaldi than shocks and pyrotechnics**



Most Vivaldi flute concerto discs home in on the six works he chose to publish as his Op 10 but French flautist Alexis Kossenko and Polish orchestra

Arte dei Suonatori here mix three Op 10 works (Nos 4 and 5, plus the slow movement from No 3) with six concertos and a fragment which survived in manuscript only. Thus we lose the entertaining pictorialism of the popular *La tempesta di mare* and *La notte* concertos for works with only numbers and keys to identify them, but please do not think that this signals loss of personality or variety. Indeed, as a demonstration of the subtle and resourceful range of Vivaldi's imagination as applied within the limitations of a set format, this is an ideal selection. Some of the concertos (eg RV438 and 429) are brilliant and bubbly, others lightly lyrical (RV432 and 435), while some (such as RV434 with its muted string colours) inhabit the rapt and luminous sound world that is Vivaldi's alone. There are novelties, too: the snaky duet between the flute and an accompanying line on cello and bassoon is surely unique.

That this comes across so affectingly on this disc is due in no small part to the performers, who recognise each work's individual character and then realise it with faultless taste and skill. Though not of the exaggerated species of interpretation which seems to want to make the composer out as a demonic dealer of aural shocks, in their astute, flexible and attractive musicianship they miss few tricks, allowing Vivaldi to emerge as a more sensitive artist than many

might have thought. Yes, Kossenko's playing has virtuosity; but more impressive is the amiable but intensely musical atmosphere that he and Arte dei Suonatori have created together. Definitely an enhancement to the Vivaldi discography. **Lindsay Kemp**

### 'Echoes of Time'

Kancheli V & V<sup>a</sup> Pärt Spiegel im Spiegel<sup>b</sup>

Rachmaninov Vocalise, Op 34 No 14<sup>b</sup>

Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 1, Op 77<sup>a</sup>

Seven Dolls' Dances – Lyrical Waltz

(arr T Batiashvili)<sup>a</sup>

Lisa Batiashvili *vm* <sup>a</sup>Hélène Grimaud *pf*<sup>b</sup>Bavarian

Radio Symphony Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen

DG © 477 9299GH (52' • DDD)

**Spellbinding Shostakovich, placed in the context of other Soviet/Russian music**



The new-found popularity of Shostakovich's greatest concerto has engendered a flood of state-of-the-art recordings but few if any are finer than this

one. The piece once seemed to belong to David Oistrakh (Sony, 7/56<sup>R</sup>) but, since Maxim Vengerov's hyper-intense recording (Warner, 2/95<sup>R</sup>), a younger generation has taken the work to its heart, sometimes experimenting as here with a less insistent mode of address. Lisa Batiashvili's reflective, almost weightless approach in the opening Nocturne – quite different from Sarah Chang's vibrato-rich traversal (EMI, 5/06) – is rendered more distinctive by the resonant acoustic of the empty Herkulessaal. For some listeners the suggestion of a lost soul will be enhanced. Orchestra and conductor might be said to be unidiomatic in their coolness and control but for all the lack of local colour the results are spellbinding, even when perfect intonation is momentarily compromised in the interests of heightened expressivity. After a *Scherzo* which gives the impression of living on the edge, the passacaglia is exceptionally poised and the cadenza more sheerly musical than usual. The finale whizzes to its end without undue triumphalism.

The makeweights are nicely calculated to give us a taster of the musical response of other significant figures trapped within and without the confines of the Soviet Russian empire in which the soloist herself spent her formative years. Batiashvili is persuasive in the mysterious *V & V* in which a taped fragment of Georgian funeral lament bookends the dreamlike atmospheric meanderings of soloist and string orchestra. While the well-nigh definitive account by Gidon Kremer (ECM, 8/05) couples additional Kancheli, just as Vengerov's Shostakovich First Concerto now comes more logically paired with the composer's Second, Lisa Batiashvili is by no means outshone. In

what is her first project for the yellow label, someone has made the decision to play up her glamour and go heavy on the eye make-up, but her gleaming, focused tone and fierce musical intelligence need no makeover.

Recommended. **David Gutman**

### 'The Italian Intermezzo'

Catalani Loreley – Dance of the Water Nymphs.

La Wally – Act 3 Intermezzo; Act 4 Intermezzo

Cilea Adriana Lecouvreur – Act 2 Intermezzo

Giordano Fedora – Act 2 Intermezzo. Siberia –

Act 2 Prelude Mascagni L'amico Fritz –

Intermezzo Ponchielli La Gioconda – Dance of

the Hours Puccini Edgar – Act 1 Prelude; Act 3

Prelude. Manon Lescaut – Act 3 Intermezzo.

Suor Angelica – Intermezzo Verdi La traviata –

Act 3 Prelude Wolf-Ferrari Jewels of the Madonna

– Intermezzo. I quattro rusteghi – Intermezzo

Leoncavallo Pagliacci – Intermezzo

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra /

Gianandrea Noseda

Chandos © CHAN10634 (73' • DDD)

**Orchestral excerpts provide a winning programme of opera without words**



For those who would love going to the opera if only it wasn't for the singing, this disc could be the ideal choice.

Unlike most previous collections of its

kind, this Chandos selection of operatic intermezzos limits itself to a single period. All the orchestral numbers are from operas that are commonly (if sometimes inaccurately) classed as Italian *verismo*, with the single exception of Verdi's *La traviata*, though that opera's contemporary setting and subject matter arguably make it at least as veristic as the others.

There is plenty of variety here, from the light touch of Catalani's *Loreley*, with its water sprites skimming across the surface, to the Grand Guignol opening of Act 2 of Giordano's melodramatic *Siberia*, depicting prisoners trudging through the winter snow. Not all work well in isolation – the two extracts from Catalani's *La Wally* are apt to meander – but there is ample compensation in some of the other lesser-known items, such as the contrasting pair by Wolf-Ferrari, his playful *I quattro rusteghi* and sentimentally lyrical *Jewels of the Madonna*.

Gianandrea Noseda and the BBC Philharmonic make alert guides in this repertoire. Although the string tone can be on the thin side, too much of a pasty English complexion in music that asks for a Mediterranean glow, the playing is well detailed and the performances are convincing. Chandos's recording is typically rich and the bass drum should give your speakers a good workout.

**Richard Fairman**



# Film music

Alexandre Desplat's wizard soundtrack • Carl Davis revisits his television scores

## Desplat

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1 – original motion picture soundtrack  
London Symphony Orchestra / Alexandre Desplat

Sony (P) 88697 79471-2 (74' • DDD)

**The beginning of the end for Potter and pals – but is this a magical soundtrack?**



When Warner Bros announced that Alexandre Desplat would compose the soundtrack for the final *Harry Potter* film, *Deathly Hallows*, it

seemed they had made a perfect match, given the imagination and flair he has brought to such diverse titles as *The Queen* and *Benjamin Button*. Alas, it hasn't quite worked out that way. There's a curious anonymity about his music for this soundtrack, the first of two films to be produced from JK Rowling's last *Potter* book.

Save for the reprise of "Hedwig's Theme" by John Williams, there's not much that can be identified as the soundtrack to a *Harry Potter* film, giving the impression that the composer is still finding his own voice. Many cues promise much but fail to deliver, such as "Hermione's Parents", where a solo flute begins an elfin-like episode that dissipates into dark rumblings. It's no surprise that the overall tone of the soundtrack is dark, with lower strings and mournful wind predominating. This elegiac tone continues in "At the Burrow" and the two tracks "Ron Leaves" and "Ron's Speech". Exceptions are "Lovegood", in which Desplat's resourceful and ingenious orchestration shines through, with a small chamber group including mandolin creating an eerie ambience, and "The Locket", a delicately scored, jewel-like waltz. "Sky Battle" and the compressed composition "Destroying the Locket" offer a welcome change of pace, with humorous touches cheering up "Dobby" and "Detonators".

The soundtrack, conducted by Desplat, is brilliantly played by the London Symphony Orchestra with many star instrumentalists and a fine group of London choirs adding their voices. Maybe Desplat is saving himself for the finale to this hugely successful franchise. We shall see. **Adrian Edwards**



Desplat: still finding his own voice?

## C Davis

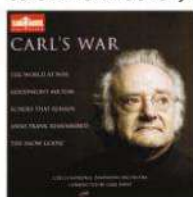
'Carl's War'

The World at War (concert version 2010).  
Echoes That Remain. Anne Frank Remembered.  
Rhapsody on Themes from 'The Snow Goose'.  
Goodnight, Mr Tom

Czech National Symphony Orchestra / Carl Davis

Carl Davis Collection (P) CDC009 (69' • DDD)

**Some of Carl Davis's most effective television scores, engagingly performed**



"Carl's War" brings together five of Carl Davis's television scores, newly recorded, with settings linked to the Second World War. Channel 4's *The World*

*at War* was a prestigious production in 26 episodes, narrated by Laurence Olivier and produced by Jeremy Isaacs, that broke new ground in Isaacs's wish to have people telling of their personal experience of the conflict. The signature tune of the series accompanying the words of the title on screen, which were engulfed by flames, lasted less than a minute, so for this concert version Davis incorporated a march that illustrated the advancing German army. This title theme has lost none of its power to grip an audience and it remains one of his most potent and memorable themes.

*Goodnight Mr Tom* was a big success when first shown on ITV in 1998 and has been something of a fixture in the channel's schedule ever since. Davis has divided the score into four parts for this recording, evoking scenes of both city and countryside, which evinces his compassion for the boy, a disturbed evacuee from the London blitz, who finds companionship with Mr Tom in a touching portrait by the actor John Thaw.

*Echoes That Remain*, a 90-minute documentary by Arnold Schwartzman, celebrates the shtetl (small villages) and their Jewish inhabitants in Eastern Europe, with a profusion of folk-like tunes of Yiddish origin, many of them sung to the composer by his mother and aunt, and incorporated into this score. The music reflects their daily rural life of play and prayer, ending with their eventual enforced exodus. *Anne Frank Remembered*, a 1995 epic documentary by Jon Blair, follows the much-told story of her brief life in music that by no means discourages the hope that the ending might have been otherwise, the affirmative message being that this was a life we cannot ignore. *The Snow Goose*, adapted from Paul Gallico's novel for a BBC TV film in 1971, scored for full orchestra, makes a contrasting and welcome respite with bright outdoor music that wears its heart on its sleeve. All this music is winningly played by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under the composer's enthusiastic direction. **Adrian Edwards**



# Chamber

Biber's remarkable Rosary Sonatas • Saint-Saëns's late woodwind works • Followers of Corelli

## Bartók • Rihm

**Bartók** Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, Sz110 **Rihm** Schrift-Um-Schrift  
**Franz Schindlbeck, Jan Schlichte** *perc*

**GrauSchumacher Piano Duo**

(Andreas Grau, Götz Schumacher *pf*s)

Neos ⑤ NEOS11032 (57' • DDD)

**Primitivism and potency in two works for pairs of pianos and percussion**



In a recording like this one – forceful, spectacularly virtuosic – Bartók's Sonata for two pianos and percussion (1937) sounds as if the

composer were relishing aspects of the very militaristic aggressiveness that would shortly drive him away from Europe to America. The extreme simplicity of at least some of the sonata's basic materials leads to an air of urban relentlessness at war with the folk-like exuberance that Bartók probably meant to predominate. But, as this brilliantly precise performance shows, there's an undertow of desperation even in the third movement's would-be jocularity, the characteristic Bartókian symmetries and regular patternings of the music's formal design offering little guarantee of expressive stability.

Seventy years later, when he was completing *Schrift-Um-Schrift*, Wolfgang Rihm could root his use of the piano-and-percussion medium in a very different musical world, with Boulez and Stockhausen providing particularly important precedents. In place of Bartók's hard-won continuities, Rihm opts for fractured, often brittle textures as the best way of placing the surprisingly homogeneous sound world of his composition in the most effective relief. For much of the time there's less sense of the musical layering – fold upon fold – that the title could be felt to imply, more of a Beckettian drama in which action and inaction wrestle for supremacy. But one way in which Rihm might indeed be writing his composition over or against Bartók's is in his relish for the kind of relatively primitive yet potent effects that instruments with limited capacity to sustain sounds can produce. This performance is a model of sustained alertness, the recording admirably spacious and sonorous.

**Arnold Whittall**



## Cage

4'33"

**Cage** Against the Machine

Wall of Sound ⑤ download available from iTunes, Amazon, HMV, 7Digital and Play (4'33" • DDD)

**John Cage's iconic work is recorded anew to raise money for good causes**



**Peter Dickinson**

## Franck • Grieg • Janáček

**Franck** Violin Sonata **Grieg** Violin Sonata No 2, Op 13 **Janáček** Violin Sonata

**Vadim Repin** *vn* **Nikolai Lugansky** *pf*

DG ⑤ 477 8794GH (65' • DDD)

**Two virtuosos in thrilling readings of three violin sonata masterpieces**



Repin and Lugansky make a formidable duo, finely matched in tone and both true virtuosos. Brilliant pieces such as the Grieg finale and dramatic

ones like the last movement of the Janáček, sound thrilling – it's impossible not to respond to this vital, wholehearted playing. Elsewhere, there are other delights: bright, weightless tone to create a fairy-tale atmosphere in the Janáček's second movement, a very free but entirely convincing account of the middle movement in the Grieg and a quite magnificent performance of the piano part of the Franck, with rich tone, beautifully even fingerwork (you'll be aware of this immediately at the start of the second movement) and a strong sense of harmonic direction.

I've one criticism – but, I think, a crucial one – of Repin's performance. His tone is, like Lugansky's, rich, and he's able to point the climax of a phrase in a memorable way but he seems to attach little importance to a *legato* line. Sometimes, indeed, as in the running passage just after the canonic tune that opens the Franck Sonata's finale, he actually separates notes that are slurred, but even when there's a smooth connection there's no intensity in the way the notes are joined. The soaring second theme of the Franck's second movement sounds to me as though Repin is merely playing with the music, whereas Ray Chen (Sony, 2/11) really plays it, bringing out the full emotional potential. It's a most attractive programme, however, and otherwise very well played, with opulent recorded sound. **Duncan Druce**

## Liszt • Smetana

**Liszt** Elégies – No 1, S130<sup>b</sup>; No 2, S131<sup>a</sup>.

La lugubre gondola, S134<sup>b</sup>. Romance oubliée, S132<sup>a</sup>. Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth, S382<sup>a</sup>.

Tristia (transc of Vallée d'Obermann)

**Smetana** Piano Trio, B104 Op 15



**Trio Wanderer** (Jean-Marc Phillips-Varjabédian *vn* Raphaël Pidoux *vc* Vincent Coq *pf*)  
 Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2060 (73' • DDD)

### Heartfelt performances of works imbued with grief



It's not every CD that has grief, misery and death as its theme, but then some of Western music's finest works have been inspired

by desolation. At the centre of the Trio Wanderer's programme is Smetana's early G minor Trio, a lament over the death of his small daughter and a model for the later "elegiac trios" of Dvořák, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov. "No *Archduke*," wrote JB Priestley, one of whose favourite works this was, "but then would a little girl want one? – but a work of great tenderness and some depth." These qualities are vividly conveyed by the Trio Wanderer with Vincent Coq's piano well to the fore in a bright acoustic, though on balance I prefer the lighter touch of Jitka Čechová with the Smetana Trio (Supraphon).

The other major work is a real rarity on disc, *Tristia*, Liszt's revision of a trio arrangement by the Danish composer Edward Lassen of one of his greatest works, "Vallée d'Obermann" from the Swiss book of *Années de pèlerinage*. The duologue between violin and cello is most effective in emphasising the *Weltschmerz* rather than the pianistic virtuosity of the original, though the Trio does not hold back in the ecstatic final pages. The five remaining Liszt pieces are for cello or violin with piano, all late works from around 1880 and ending with "Elegy No 3", better known in its piano original, *La lugubre gondola*, Liszt's prescient vision of his son-in-law Wagner's death. Heartfelt, lyrical performances with an excellent booklet by Jan Wolfrum.

Jeremy Nicholas

## Mozart

Divertimento, K563. Preludes and Fugues, K404a – No 4; No 5

**Hermitage String Trio** (Boris Garlitsky *vn* Alexander Zemtsov *va* Leonid Gorkhov *vc*)  
 Chandos © CHANI0635 (64' • DDD)

*Divertimento – selected comparison:*

Leopold Stg Trio (A/01) (HYPE) CDA67246

### An intimate style leads to revelations in Mozart's far from light Divertimento



In Italian it means "amusement". Apply it to music and "divertimento" could mean light or recreational. For the Hermitage String Trio such dictionary definitions are not the stuff

**Amazing range: Daniel Sepec and colleagues**



Inspired performances of Biber's Marian sonatas

# Mystery and MEDITATION

## HIF Biber

Mystery (Rosary) Sonatas and Passacaglia

**Daniel Sepec** *vn* Hille Perl *vda*

**Lee Santana** *theo* Michael Behringer *bpd*

Coviello © 2 COV21008 (125' • DDD)



Biber's "Mystery" or "Rosary" Sonatas are remarkable both for their musical quality and for their extraordinary use of

*scordatura* – changing the violin's normal tuning. Indeed, of the 15 sonatas, only the first (and the unaccompanied Passacaglia, added as a postlude) preserves the regular tuning; the other 14 all use a different mis-tuning. Why did Biber do this? The *scordaturas* make possible certain chords and passages that would not be feasible otherwise, but other aspects of playing become more difficult. If, as has recently been argued (by Daniel Edgar in *The Encoding of Faith* – PhD thesis, University of York: 2008), the Sonatas are intended as objects of meditation on the Mysteries of the Rosary (a series of events in the life of the Virgin) then the *scordatura* can represent a process of transformation – each tuning altering the violin's sound and response, with the point

of greatest strain coming as Christ's sufferings reach their climax.

Are the Sonatas programme music? Daniel Sepec thinks so and his ideas about Biber's descriptive intentions inspire his performance. Often these are persuasive – the fluttering of the Angel's wings in the First Sonata (*The Annunciation*) or, in the Tenth Sonata (*The Crucifixion*), the hammering of nails into the Cross. His interpretation of the opening of the Eleventh Sonata (*The Resurrection*) as a sunrise is extremely poetic but I'm less sure about the deliberately ugly sounds in the Seventh Sonata (*The Scourging of Jesus*). In general, these are very fine-sounding performances. Sepec use three violins (to facilitate changes of tuning), all made by Jakob Stainer, known to Biber, and whose instruments were at one time valued even above Stradivari's. The performances benefit greatly from the varied continuo group and often have a spacious, majestic character.

The Salzburg pitch seems to have been high in Biber's time and I'd love to hear a recording that's at, or above, modern pitch. But what emerges very clearly from these discs is the amazing range of Biber's inspiration, brought out by playing that's imaginative and deeply committed.

Duncan Druce



## Chamber reviews

of K563. Nor are they for the Leopold String Trio. Each group in its way probes beyond the printed page. Disbelief in the definitions is shared but is expressed somewhat differently. In the first movement, for instance, Mozart asks that both halves be repeated. The Leopold repeat only the first half but don't compromise stature. The Hermitage follow instructions and the extra length adds weight to a more intimate style. Tempo is similar, approach dissimilar; but these musicians don't compromise stature either.

Dissimilarity is sharper in the second movement. The Leopold's performance, slower than *Adagio*, is long-breathed, the high emotional horizon reached through a drawn-out intensity. The Hermitage follow another route to the heights. Their pacing is faster, and stirring power is evoked through arching paragraphs shaped by subtle rubatos. Dynamics undulate as phrases are stretched then released back into tempo, elastic – perhaps rhapsodic too – but always disciplined.

The variances in interpretation are at their most marked here, as indeed is the variance in temperament. If the Leopold veer towards intellectual rigour, the Hermitage prefer an unstudied impulse. Check out the final *Allegro* in 6/8 time and also the Preludes and Fugues. The nub of the matter is that re-creativity is complementary. A single choice cannot be justified. So why not experience two views of one unquestioned masterpiece?

Nalen Anthoni

## Onslow • Spohr

**Onslow** Nonet, Op 77 **Spohr** Nonet, Op 31  
**Osmosis** (Kate Clark *fl* Ofer Frenkel *ob* Nicole van Bruggen *cl* Benny Aghassi *bn* Helen MacDougall *bn*) with members of the **Nepomuk Fortepiano Quintet** (Franc Polman *vn* Elisabet Smalt *va* Jan Insinger *vc* Pieter Smithuijsen *db*)  
Ramée (P) RAM1007 (69' • DDD)

### Early-19th-century nonets that trace the musical revolutions of the period



Spohr and Onslow were exact contemporaries, both born in 1784, but their nonets lie a generation apart, in date and in spirit. Spohr's work belongs to 1813 and the world of his fellow student Weber, and its elegance is well conveyed in this attractive performance. There is perhaps more sheer zest to be found in the animated finale but the *Adagio* is gracefully song-like, not so far removed from the Vienna of Schubert, and the opening *Allegro* has all the charm which Spohr himself clearly exercised over his audiences. The recording rather over-favours the bass-line but otherwise pays lucid

attention to the particular tone quality of the reconstructions of period instruments which are used: the woodwind are all based on examples made between 1790 and about 1810.

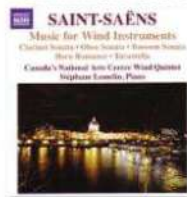
Things had changed a lot by 1848, the date of George Onslow's Nonet. Nevertheless, the instruments have a lucidity that still suits the music. Though the harmonic and melodic idiom has not advanced all that far, there is an attention to the individual sound of the instruments which almost looks forward to Mahler. Onslow, French-domiciled and with a French mother, was unusual for his time and place in his interest in chamber music, and his ear for the sounds of the instruments is subtle and delightful. His Theme and Variations are virtually variations on the sounds to be drawn from the theme, rather than the melodic possibilities, and this is attractively realised by the players. There is a touch of melancholy in his music, emphasised by the performance here even in the restless *Scherzo (Agitato)*, but the grasp of his idiom and the sympathetic response of the players make this a most enjoyable performance.

John Warrack

## Saint-Saëns

Caprice sur des airs danois et russes, Op 79<sup>a</sup>. Clarinet Sonata, Op 167<sup>b</sup>. Oboe Sonata, Op 166<sup>c</sup>. Bassoon Sonata, Op 168<sup>d</sup>. Romance, Op 67<sup>e</sup>. Tarantella, Op 6<sup>f</sup>  
**Canada's National Arts Centre Wind Quintet** (<sup>a</sup>Joanna G'froerer *fl* <sup>ac</sup>Charles Hamann *ob* <sup>abf</sup>Kimball Sykes *cl* <sup>d</sup>Christopher Millard *bn* <sup>e</sup>Lawrence Vine *bn*)  
**Stéphane Lemelin** *pf*  
Naxos (S) 8 570964 (64' • DDD)

### Gallic charm and exuberance in chamber works from the end of Saint-Saëns's life



Saint-Saëns's acute ear for the personality of particular instruments is nowhere more conspicuous than in the three sonatas that he composed in the last year of his life, 1921. These final forays into the realms of chamber music also show Saint-Saëns winnowing his style, so that, while still having recourse to the generous fund of lyricism on which he had always been able to capitalise, he now wrote with conscious economy of means.

The members of Canada's National Arts Centre Wind Quintet appreciate and convey these facets in performances that encapsulate the Gallic charm and finesse of the music. At the same time, the Oboe Sonata's mix of the pastoral and the perky is nicely established, as is the blend of warmth and bravura in the Clarinet Sonata, with its lowest register explored in the solemn *Lento*

## IN THE STUDIO

### Countertenor duetti

Two prominent countertenors were in the studio at Salle Auguste Blanqui, Paris, last month for Virgin Classics. From January 19 to 23, Philippe Jaroussky and Max Emanuel Cenac were recording "Duetti da camera", a disc of duets by Handel, Steggani, Durante, Cesti, Clari and Marcello that the pair had previously performed in France and Spain throughout January. As with the live performances, the singers were joined by Les Arts Florissants under William Christie. The proposed release date is November 2011.

### A winter journey

Another singer, Florian Boesch, was recording for the Onyx label at the end of January. The Austrian baritone, whose debut at the Schubertiade in 2002 has led to recitals all over the world, was at All Saints' Church, East Finchley, from January 27 to 31 to record Schubert's *Winterreise* with Malcolm Martineau, a pianist with whom he works on a regular basis (the pair have a recital at Wigmore Hall on March 30). The resulting disc will be released in September.

### Copenhagen Noël

Christmas may only come once a year but, for Theatre of Voices, it's a more regular event. The vocal group were at the Garnisons Church in Copenhagen at the beginning of January to record a Christmas disc for their third joint CD with Ars Nova Copenhagen. Of their two previous ventures, David Lang's *The Little Match Girl Passion* won a Grammy last year and music by Arvo Pärt is released this summer. The ensemble's Christmas disc, on which they are joined by Theatre of Voices instrumentalists, will be released before December, they hope, on Harmonia Mundi.

### A Callas homage

Angela Gheorghiu has been back in the studio to continue work on "Hommage à Callas" for EMI Classics. The Romanian soprano was at Abbey Road at the beginning of January to complete the recording, which features the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Marco Armiliato. It is due for release later this year.

### Noseda's farewell

Gianandrea Noseda and the BBC Philharmonic were at Manchester's Studio 7 late last year recording two works by Růžička - his Symphony No 6 and the Overture to *The Bride of Messina*. The results will be released by Chandos in April. Noseda steps down as the orchestra's chief conductor in September, when he will be succeeded by Juanjo Mena.



Making new acquaintances:  
Musica Antiqua Roma



# Roman REDISCOVERIES

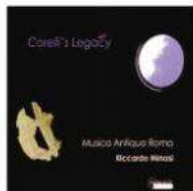
Tracing the influence of Corelli's Op 5 Sonatas

## 'Corelli's Legacy'

Corelli Sonata, Op 5 No 9 Carbonelli Sonata, Op 1 No 2 Mossi Sonata, Op 1 No 5 Visconti Sonata, Op 2 No 5 Castrucci Sonata, Op 1 No 4 Locatelli Sonata, Op 8 No 10 Montanari Sonata in D minor – Giga senza basso

Musica Antiqua Roma

(Riccardo Minasi *vm* Marco Ceccato *vc* Giulia Nuti *hpd/org* Margret Köll *triple hp*)  
Passacaille © PAS962 (58' • DDD)



You may not yet have heard of Riccardo Minasi and there's a pretty good chance you won't have heard of most of the composers on

this disc. If you are the slightest bit interested in the Baroque fiddle, however, you will be wanting to make all their acquaintances at the earliest opportunity, because this examination of the large but shapely footprint left by Corelli's Op 5 violin sonatas is a treat both for its playing and for its music. Starting with Corelli's Ninth Sonata in the ornament-encrusted version handed down by Geminiani, it continues with sonatas by Giovanni Stefano Carbonelli (noble and strong-boned), Giovanni Mossi (dark and moody, relieved by flashes of violinistic

brilliance), Gasparo Visconti (the earliest after Corelli's sonatas and the most like them in graceful style), Prospero Castrucci (short and punchy) and Locatelli (the most modern-sounding and outgoing, with a role for the cello almost equal to that of the violin), and finishes with a skittish unaccompanied Giga by Antonio Maria Montanari. Each of these works has its own character but each too bears recognisable signs of Corellian elegance and formal coherence.

That four of them are here recorded for the first time puts us in Minasi's debt even before we hear him touch his violin.

When he does, it is with a freewheeling eloquence and vigour that confirms what hitherto seems to have been a bit of a well-kept secret: that he is one of the most exciting and engaging Baroque violinists in the business. Bold, expressive and welcoming of vibrato, his playing may strike some as a little fidgety, but no one could deny its mercurial brilliance or its clean-lined and vibrant singing tone. With a sweetly spacious acoustic that yet allows the excellent continuo team focus and substance, and an informative booklet-note, this is top-league stuff.

Lindsay Kemp

## INTERVIEW

### Riccardo Minasi

This Corelli project was a long time in the making. I discovered so much music by composers influenced by Corelli that I could probably have filled 10 CDs, so I had to choose only the very best works for the disc.

I founded Musica Antiqua Roma in 2007, the same year this recording was made. Having two partners like Giulia Nuti and Marco Ceccato is such a joy – with them everything comes so easily and automatically. On this disc we worked hard to establish equal tension in all four violin and cello strings, something that most modern string players avoid. On most modern instruments the first string has the most tension

and this decreases in strings 2, 3 and 4. But by reconfiguring the instrument so all strings were equal this produced a more direct sound.

We were also keen to play these sonatas with more than a single continuo instrument. It is generally thought that these works are for violin and harpsichord or cello because in Italian the word "o" means "or" rather than "and". However, I found two separate Corelli editions, published in London just one year after the first Op 5 edition came out, with a violin part, a general score for harpsichord and a separate cello part of just the bass-line. This means that certainly at the time at least three instruments might perform this music. **Interview by Charlotte Smith**





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movement and its capacity for exuberance in the finale. In the Bassoon Sonata, Saint-Saëns again reveals his ability to write music of a character individually tailored to the instrument's timbre and tonal palette, here within the context of piece that takes Baroque compositional principles as a model.

The unifying feature of this programme is the excellently judged piano playing of Stéphane Lemelin, who adds a discerning range of colour and spirit to the performances, whether in the sonatas or in the lovely Romance for horn, the lively Tarantella for flute and clarinet, or the *Caprice on Danish and Russian Airs*, which Saint-Saëns dedicated to the Danish-born wife of Russia's Tsar Alexander III.

Geoffrey Norris

## Schulhoff

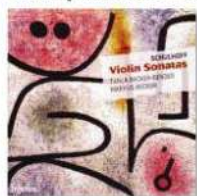
Violin Sonatas<sup>a</sup> – No 1, WV24 (Op 7);  
No 2, WV91. Sonata for Solo Violin, WV83.  
Suite, WV18 (Op 1)<sup>a</sup>

Tanja Becker-Bender *vn*

<sup>a</sup>Markus Becker *pf*

Hyperion © CDA67833 (67' • DDD)

**Tanja Becker-Bender and Markus Becker champion Schulhoff's chamber works**



It is good to see recordings of Ervin Schulhoff's music presenting his compositions on their own merits. If there is a Schulhoff problem

today it has less to do with his premature death in 1942, a victim of Nazi persecution, than with the unstable, protean nature of his creative output. Schulhoff toyed with such a range of idioms that it isn't clear when he is merely having us on. Neither the Dadaist prankster nor the socialist realist composer of big statements is represented here. The Suite, an early piece dating from 1911, is his official Opus 1 and it resembles the late Romantic music of his teacher, Max Reger. Markus Becker, a subtle and sophisticated executant, is, on disc at least, much associated with that composer's instrumental oeuvre. Schulhoff's First Violin Sonata (1913) adds Debussy to the mix without establishing an unmistakably personal stylistic profile.

The First World War triggered more absurdist experiments, banishing any vestiges of the palm court, but by 1927, when the remaining works in this programme were written, Schulhoff would seem to have mastered a more conventional, pseudo-ethnic or vaguely Bartókian form of modernism, content to peddle his jazz-inspired novelties elsewhere. Among his most durable mainstream scores, the Sonata for Solo Violin is not just an effective and compact display piece. Adopting some more extreme tempi than Daniel Hope (DG, 10/07), Tanja Becker-

Bender can muster both impressively full tone and a not inappropriate astringent edge. No mean virtuoso, her previous release for Hyperion was an acclaimed set of Paganini Caprices (5/09) and it helps that the company provides a helpful booklet-note that does not over-egg the contextual pudding. The artwork is by the similarly unclassifiable Paul Klee. Worth a punt.

David Gutman

## Veracini

Violin Sonatas – Op 1 No 7; Op 1 No 12;  
Op 2 No 12; in D minor; in D minor

Riccardo Minasi *vn*

Musica Antiqua Roma (Marco Ceccato *vc*

Giulia Nuti, Ottaviano Tenerani *hpd*

Luca Pianca *alte* Margret Köll *triple hp*)

DHM © 88697 70530-2 (72' • DDD)

**An opportunity to reassess the music of a well-trained Florentine composer**



I confess that, up to now, I've not rated Veracini's music especially highly. An expert, well-trained composer, certainly, but he seems content

to employ a post-Corelli lingua franca, while contemporaries such as Vivaldi and Tartini were producing more innovative and individual music. By all accounts, Veracini was a wonderful violinist but as a person somewhat difficult and eccentric. Riccardo Minasi is well able to produce the necessary high virtuosity, and though there's nothing eccentric about his style, his ability to improvise elaborate, graceful, occasionally extravagant decorations gives these accounts a fascinatingly personal character, suggesting how the 18th-century maestro might have appeared to his audience.

It's not just a question of ornaments, either. Helped by his large continuo group, providing imaginatively varied backing, Minasi points up the particular sound world and expressive concerns of each sonata. In Op 1 No 7 in A major he produces a bright, penetrating tone to emphasise the music's extrovert brilliance. In the much simpler D minor "Vienna" sonata, on the other hand, the uncomplicated, folk-style melodies – in character collective rather than solo-like – are often doubled by plucked continuo, an effect that's expressively appropriate as well as being attractive and unusual. Only in the final sonata from Op 2 did I feel the interpretation was slightly overdrawn; for example, the languid start of the first-movement *Passagallo* seems affected, with its slow tempo and continual hesitations. It's still a splendid performance, though, and I'm grateful to Musica Antiqua Roma for kindling in me (and I hope in you) a new interest in Veracini. **Duncan Druce**

## Cantatas

BWV 51 "Jauchzet Gott" & BWV 199  
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**Arias from:** BWV 31, 57, 84 & 105

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# Instrumental

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## Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 9, Op 14 No 1; No 10, Op 14 No 2; No 19, Op 49 No 1; No 20, Op 49 No 2; No 24, Op 78; No 25, Op 79

Mari Kodama *pf*

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 304 (68' • DDD/DSD)

A Brendel protégée continues her admirable Beethoven sonata cycle



This is Mari Kodama's sixth disc in her projected recording of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas. Born in Japan but raised in Germany, she studied with

Germaine Mounier, Tatiana Nikolaieva and Alfred Brendel, her invaluable mentor. Kodama is widely experienced and her performances of sonatas she calls "lyrical islands" are graceful, fluent and musically transparent. Everything proceeds in a faultless flow of sound and in this sense her credentials are impeccable. Never bearing down heavily on the music, she always allows Beethoven his own voice. And it is here that one steps in not to criticise such admirable virtues but to wonder whether, even at his most engagingly lyrical, Beethoven is quite as well-mannered as these performances suggest. Kodama shies away from those typical *sf* nudges commencing at bar 16 in the first movement of Op 78, a moment when Beethoven vitalises his outwardly benign nature. She has little use for extraneous pleading or for those who turn Beethoven's clearly marked *allegretto* second movement of Op 14 No 2 into an idiosyncratic limp (Richter, who, clearly missing a slow movement, creates one of his own). Such gestures are not for her, though her gentle unmarked *accelerando* at the end of Op 49 No 1's second movement is a welcome feature in playing which just occasionally threatens to become featureless.

A bonus DVD includes a performance of the first two movements of the D major Sonata, Op 10 No 3, some characteristically modest but helpful observations and a tribute to her dream team in the studios. Sound and presentation are ideal. **Bryce Morrison**

## Busoni

'Piano Music, Vol 7'

Concert Fantasy on 'Themes from Goldmark's 'Merlin', KB55. Fantasy on Themes from

Cornelius's 'The Barber of Baghdad', KB52.

Variation-Study after Mozart No 1: Canzonetta from 'Don Giovanni'. Siegfried's Funeral March from 'Götterdämmerung', KB111. Sonatinas – No 3, 'Ad usum infantis', K268; No 6, 'Fantasia da camera sur Carmen', K284. Five Short Pieces for the Cultivation of Polyphonic Playing, K296

Wolf Harden *pf*

Naxos (N) 8 572422 (68' • DDD)

Operatic fantasies played without much sense of fantasy



Few of us will have known of the existence of Busoni's early *Merlin* Fantasy – about the same number, I guess, who have ever heard a note of Goldmark's once-popular

opera of 1888 – or have come across his *Fantasy on Themes from Cornelius's 'The Barber of Baghdad'*. The latter was Busoni's first effort at such a transcription, written between nine at night and three in the morning without a piano and without his ever having seen the opera. I wish I could say that either were worthy successors to Liszt's operatic transcriptions but I can't. *Merlin*, a lengthy 17'40", has its moments but fails to cohere into an effective whole; both are curiosities worth hearing once.

More impressive is the Wagner transcription (1883) but we only experience Busoni's individual voice in the remaining (later) works. After the drily executed Mozart "Variation-Study", one finally has to acknowledge that, sadly, in Wolf Harden we are listening to a pianist of a different order to, say, Egon Petri, whose Busoni recordings remain among the most valuable of piano discs. Harden plays exactly what is on the printed page but goes no further. Petri's musical imagination in *Sonatina* No 3 brings charm, warmth and intimacy to this little gem, while in the *Carmen* Chamber Fantasy (aka *Sonatina* No 6) his ability to toy with the virtuosic challenges of the score (equalled, it must be said, by Ogdon and Hamelin) put Harden's worthy efforts in the shade. That said, the disc, well-recorded at Pottton Hall, will be an essential buy for all Busoni completists. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Chopin

Four Ballades<sup>c</sup>. Barcarolle, Op 60<sup>c</sup>. Berceuse, Op 57<sup>c</sup>. Etudes – Op 10<sup>d</sup>; Op 25<sup>d</sup>; Op 10 No 3<sup>c</sup>; Op 10 No 4<sup>c</sup>. Fantasia, Op 49<sup>c</sup>. Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op 66<sup>c</sup>. Three Impromptus<sup>c</sup>.

Mazurkas<sup>c</sup> – No 7, Op 7 No 3; No 13, Op 17 No 4; No 23, Op 33 No 2. Nocturne No 4, Op 15 No 1<sup>c</sup>. Piano Concertos<sup>a</sup> – No 1, Op 11; No 2, Op 21. Piano Sonatas<sup>b</sup> – No 2, Op 35; No 3, Op 58. Preludes<sup>c</sup>, Op 28 – No 6; No 7; No 15. Waltzes<sup>c</sup> – No 1, Op 18; No 5, Op 42

Murray Perahia *pf*

<sup>a</sup>Israel Philharmonic Orchestra / Zubin Mehta Sony (S) 88697 64823-2 (4h 48' • DDD)

From <sup>a</sup>SK44922 (6/90), <sup>b</sup>MK76242 (7/74<sup>n</sup>), <sup>c</sup>SK64399 (12/94), <sup>d</sup>SK61885 (11/02), <sup>e</sup>MK39708

Recorded <sup>b</sup>1974, <sup>c</sup>1983, <sup>d</sup>live 1989, <sup>e</sup>1994, <sup>f</sup>2001

Perahia's poetic way with Chopin makes this an essential collection



The Chopin anniversary year of 2010 understandably saw a maelstrom of Chopin recordings, making selection a tricky and subjective issue. Yet

Sony's five-disc reissue of Murray Perahia's discs spanning a 28-year period is surely the most distinguished of all: a reflection of Chopin's unique balance of Gallic poise and Slavic passion, a flawless yet audacious mix of what EM Forster once called "the prose and the passion".

I know there are those who feel that Perahia's immaculate taste and precision are at the expense of a greater spontaneity, who long for him to break out from such contained and crystalline perfection, yet I have to say that exaggeration and artificiality have always been alien to his patrician nature. You may hear more idiosyncratic Chopin from, say, Cortot, Moiseiwitsch, Cherkassky and Horowitz (whose Chopin was aptly described by Rudolf Serkin as "like a fireball exploding"), or a more "boggle-factor" virtuosity from Lazar Berman, but you will rarely hear such classic strength of purpose, such poetry and lucidity. Every bar, indeed every note is deeply considered, yet the effect is as natural as it is unarguable. Nothing will lure Perahia from such poise and all his performances declare that Chopin is far too great a composer for even a hint of exhibitionism.

Perahia has often mentioned his love of a past generation of master-pianists, of Cortot, Schnabel and Edwin Fischer, but he is surely the true heir to Rubinstein, whose heroic rescue of Chopin from salon accretion and sentimentality he proudly



emulates. Few if any performances have excelled, let alone surpassed his exquisite grace in the Berceuse, in that “rain of silvery fire”, and what a sense of wonder he achieves in the ballade-like progression of the Second Impromptu. It is hardly surprising that many years ago two then stars of the Juilliard School in New York turned their initial condescension towards a pianist they considered from a lesser establishment (the Mannes School) into awe and envy as they listened to Perahia’s way with Chopin’s Impromptus. Try the central oases of calm in the *Scherzo* and Funeral March of the Second Sonata, or the quaver flow at the heart of the Third Sonata’s *Largo*, and you will hear a musical and technical ideal far removed from cloying decadence or excess.

Again, what mastery in the codas of the Four Ballades (for Claudio Arrau an ultimate challenge), where every intricacy is resolved with a translucency that few could equal. A rapidly flowing way with the E flat minor Etude from Op 10 may raise a few eyebrows, yet the music’s malaise and morbidity remain, and elsewhere in the Etudes Perahia once more reveals one of the truly sovereign techniques and poetic impulses of our time. Sony’s flip-box presentation takes some getting used to and admirers of their great artist may wonder at the exclusion of 21 of the 24 Preludes. But the remastered sound is gloriously true to Perahia’s recognisable sonority. This is the Chopin issue par excellence, not just for 2010 but for all time.

Bryce Morrison

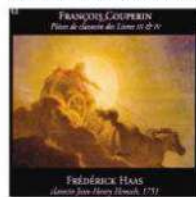
## F Couperin

Livre de clavecin – Book 3, Ordres 14-17; Book 4, Ordres 22, 24, 26 & 27

Frédéric Haas *bpd*

Alpha ② ALPHA173 (167' • DDD)

**A second selection from the Pièces de clavecin, with some noises off**



This selection of eight *ordres* (or suites) from the third and fourth books of *Pièces de clavecin* is French harpsichordist Frédéric Haas’s second Couperin release, following a similar-sized package from the first and second books. There are good reasons to hope that he keeps going. His booklet essay reveals a thoughtful admiration for Couperin’s subtle and attractive personality as revealed by these harpsichord miniatures and makes the point that we should not waste too much time trying to understand what every one of their intriguing and enigmatic titles signifies. Enough, says Haas, to play them and let the eloquence of the music reveal its own meaning, an approach which he backs up with the assertion that it was not in the written word but in



A British pianist's distinctive voice in Chopin

## Stylish INTIMACY

### Chopin

Three Ecosais, Op 72. Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op 66. Fantaisie, Op 49. Three Impromptus. Mazurkas – Op 6; Op 17. Two Nocturnes, Op 27. Waltz No 6, ‘Minute’, Op 64 No 1

Leon McCawley *pf*

Somm Céleste ② SOMMCD0103 (70' • DDD)



As the Chopin year drew to a close, Leon McCawley added his own personal and distinctive voice in performances which veer away from the glamour and opulence of the concert hall, almost as if given before a late-night audience of carefully chosen friends. His inwardness and reserve pay rich dividends in the C sharp minor Nocturne’s coda, where Chopin’s gloom and despondency are finally pierced with light. And in the companion Nocturne in D flat, his translucent tone is particularly apt in so

much sumptuous cantilena and double-note blossoming. He is notably at home in the darkness and pained introspection of the A minor Mazurka, Op 17 No 4, and, per contra, is deft and stylish in his curtain-raiser, the “Minute” Waltz, where he is too musically to become involved in a superficial race against the clock.

Elsewhere his performances are apt to shy away from Chopin’s turbulence and audacity. He tones down the Op 17 A flat Mazurka’s mood, its nagging rather than entreating child malaise, and there are many moments when his pedalling is overly discreet, denying him a greater range of breadth and colour. There is more animation in the Fantaisie-Impromptu’s whirling agitation and a greater sense of grandeur in the F minor Fantaisie, always among Chopin’s most epic utterances. But, more generally, the performances on this well-recorded disc are too sober-suited to capture fully Chopin’s range, drama and inclusiveness.

Bryce Morrison



## Instrumental reviews

music such as this (and its titles) that the true soul of poetry resided in the first part of the 18th century.

As it happens, I would not say that Haas reaches to the heart of every piece. That would be a tall order for anyone; but in general I feel that he is better in grander, more imposing and stately pieces – the sunnily majestic *Allemande* from the 16th *Ordre* for instance, or *Le Trophée*, the strongly directed *La Superbe* or the excellent passacaglia *L'Amphibie* – than in smaller, more fragile works such as *Les Vestales* or *Le point du jour*, which lack something in tenderness. His playing tends to the dignified and serious, eschewing the cute teasings of Mitzi Meyerson's recital (Glossa, 12/05) while not aiming either for the silky *froidueur* of Christophe Rousset's complete Couperin recordings (Harmonia Mundi, 9/93 & 10/94). The bird music of the 14th *Ordre* is characterfully realised but I wanted more pastoral drowsiness in the 15th. The superb 26th *Ordre* is excellently done, however, sustaining its autumnal nobility from the soft-fingered *La Convalescente* right through to the grim humour of *La Pantomime*.

Haas's harpsichord is a fine 1751 Hemsch, fruitfully recorded and with a zingy resonance that hangs like a fine mist even after the dampers have come down. The intimate recording makes sure we catch this but I cannot for the life of me understand why the strangely explosive noises that sometimes occur between pieces – pages being flicked over? A door clicking to? A distant sneeze? Who knows? – have been left in the edit. Still, everything else here, as always with Alpha, is beautifully presented. **Lindsay Kemp**

### Knussen · Liszt · Schumann

**Knussen** *Ophelia's Last Dance*, Op 32 **Liszt** Piano Sonata, S178 **Schumann** *Humoreske*, Op 20

**Kirill Gerstein** pf

Myrios © MYRO05 (66' • DDD)

Cultivation and taste, although Gerstein can let himself go more than here



Judging by this disc, 2010 Gilmore Artist Kirill Gerstein appears to be as intelligent, accomplished and sensitive a virtuoso as

fellow prize-winners of the past, such as Leif Ove Andsnes and Piotr Anderszewski. He holds attention throughout his world-premiere recording of Oliver Knussen's *Ophelia's Last Dance* by differentiating the composer's almost impressionistic melodic and accompanimental components with a wide scope of dynamics and colours, jabbing the solitary *sforzando* high notes with stinging impact.

His clean, well-thought-out and thoroughly poised performances of the large-scale

Schumann and Liszt selections prove more vulnerable to catalogue competition, although they're never less than world-class. The *Humoreske's* unquiet undercurrents and harmonic tensions are often smoothed out by Gerstein's tendency to round off phrases and impose slight *ritards* at predictable junctures. By contrast, sections where expressive intensification would be most welcome (the one marked *Einfach und zart*) are reserved to a fault.

Still, many pianists would be glad to claim Gerstein's superb control, cultivation and taste, which make themselves felt in Liszt's B minor Sonata. Gerstein's ability to sustain quiet music at slow tempi creates an appropriately rapt aura throughout the *Andante sostenuto*, while the section leading into the recapitulation build-up is fortified by his emphasis on bass-lines. Moreover, Gerstein justifies his rhetorical phrase broadenings with plenty of dynamism and full-bodied tonal projection. But don't expect the kinetic, headlong brio of Argerich, Fleisher, Berezovsky or even Gerstein himself, when he really lets go in concert, away from the microphone's scrutiny. What will this interesting pianist serve up next?

**Jed Distler**

### Liszt

'New Discoveries, Vol 3'

Romancero espagnol, S695c. Zwei Stücke aus dem Oratorium 'Christus', S498c. Magnificat, S182a.

Trois chansons, S510a. Album-Leaves – S163a2-e; S164k-l; S166o-s; S167g-t. Variations 'Tiszántuli szép léány', S384a. Romance, S577i/bis; S577i/ter.

Schlummerlied, S186/7a. Valse-Impromptu, S213bis. Marche des pèlerins chantant la prière du soir de la Symphonie d'Harold en Italie composée par Berlioz, S473i. Einzug der Gäste auf Wartburg – Marsch aus Richard Wagners Tannhäuser, S445

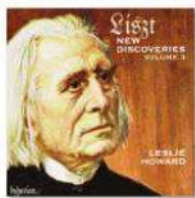
No 1a. Adagio non troppo, S151a. Prozinsky Fragment for piano, S701v. Cadenza, S695f.

Wilde Jagd – Scherzo, S176a

**Leslie Howard** pf

Hyperion © 2 CDA67810 (140' • DDD)

A must for Liszt completists as Leslie Howard makes some rare finds indeed



More than a decade after Leslie Howard seemingly put his comprehensive Liszt cycle to bed, so to speak, the indefatigable pianist/scholar has amassed nearly two and a half hours' worth of previously unknown and/or inaccessible material that ranges from album-leaf scribbles to several substantial large-scale works.

The collection opens with a real find in the three-movement, 20-minute-long *Romancero espagnol*, dating from the late 1840s. Careful restoration from the manuscript yielded a

performing version published by the Liszt Society Journal in 2009. The music is quite extrovert, dramatic and harmonically adventurous. Although the finale is based on the same *Jota aragonesa* familiar from Liszt's *Spanish Rhapsody*, it's treated quite differently for the most part. Howard also presents a first version of the *Scherzo und Marsch* that's a little more prolix and texturally unwieldy in comparison to the more compact and scintillating revision. The second movement of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* appears in a much earlier and more difficult transcription that Liszt would revise to superior pianistic effect years later. Conversely, Liszt returned to his definitive and quite faithful transcription of the March from Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in order to add a few improvisational flourishes and alterations. Even the most fragmentary short works hold fascination, such as the Andantino in A flat, which is a wistful, introspective setting of Chopin's Polish song "The Maiden's Wish", while, by contrast, an arresting, furious chromatic gesture initiates a fugue that breaks off after 18 seconds.

Clearly tackling Liszt anew in the studio has revitalised Howard's pianism. Sample the thundering sonorities he summons from the piano's bowels in the *Magnificat*, S182a, the relaxed ebb and flow he brings to the "simplified" *Valse-Impromptu*, or how even the most fragmentary works never fail to communicate shapely elegance (the 19-second Cadenza, S695f, for example). As always, Howard's annotations reveal a high level of detective work, musical insight and scholarship without pedantry.

**Jed Distler**

### Otte

Das Buch der Klänge

**Ralph van Raat** pf

Naxos © 8 572444 (67' • DDD)

American minimalism and the European avant-garde collide in Otte's world



Hans Otte's epic piano cycle *Das Buch der Klänge* ("The Book of Sounds") remains one of 20th-century music's best-guarded secrets.

Completed in the early 1980s, its distinctive sound draws upon the essential ingredients of the European avant-garde and American minimalism: simplicity versus complexity, surface versus depth, repetition versus non-repetition and process versus intuition. Divided into 12 movements (or parts), the work's large-scale, arch-like sweep charts a course through 20th-century harmony: the fragile tonal beauty of Parts I and II (minimalist Debussy) gives way to increasingly discordant explorations in Parts III, IV and V (expressionist Schoenberg meets Stockhausen's *Klavierstück IX*).



Harmony is stripped down to a skeletal atonal line in the work's central part, before navigating a circuitous route towards consonance in its remaining six sections, culminating in Part XII's affirmative chorale-like peroration. As the work's title suggests, this harmonic journey is a means to focus on sound itself, and the piano's resonant qualities lie very much to the fore.

Despite being somewhat detached and clinical at times, Ralph van Raat's impressively controlled performance does justice to the work's subtle nuances. There is plenty of dynamic and colouristic contrast here. In comparison with Otte's own 1983 recording of the work (*Celestial Harmonies*), Raat races through each part. Even taking into account the somewhat superfluous silences that punctuate each section, Raat's performance clocks in at almost 10 minutes shorter than Otte's. This is an excellent introduction to the work but both Otte's and Herbert Henck's definitive recording (ECM, 8/99) also merit serious consideration.

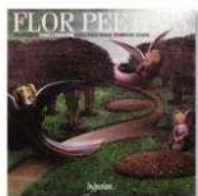
Pwyll ap Siôn

## Peeters

Aria, Op 51. Concert Piece, Op 52a. Elégie, Op 38. Lied to the Flowers, Op 66 No 3. Lied to the Sun, Op 66 No 5. Suite modale, Op 43. Ten Chorale Preludes, Op 39. Toccata, Fugue and Hymn on 'Ave maris stella', Op 28. Variations and Finale on an Old Flemish Song, Op 20

D'Arcy Trinkwon *org*  
Hyperion © CDA67825 (74' • DDD)

Played on the Marcussen organ of Tonbridge School  
**An organ composer who responded to French and Flemish influences**



This welcome release should do much to restore Peeters's reputation as one of the most craftsmanlike and consistently satisfying organist-composers of the past century. As a star pupil of the Lemmens Institute in Mechelen, Peeters drew inspiration in equal measure from the rich French tradition of Widor, Guilmant and Tournemire, the treasures of his own Flemish Renaissance polyphonic heritage and, increasingly, as he toured extensively after the Second World War, his own responses to landscape. The *Lied to the Flowers*, for example, was sketched in California, an experience not dissimilar to Messiaen's encounter with Bryce Canyon in Utah.

Although it must be a daunting challenge to reduce Peeters's vast organ output down to a 75 minute representative selection, Trinkwon has managed successfully to cover most angles, from two of the most memorable and harmonically delicious choral preludes (out of 300 plus) to the mighty *Concert Piece*

(a partial reworking of the 1944 Organ Concerto). The early *Variations and Finale on an Old Flemish Song* owe a good deal to Dupré's example. A delightful contrast is the *Suite modale* (1938), the sparkling *Scherzo* from which shows how deft and entertaining Peeters could be. The *Elégie* (on the death of Peeters's mother) is given an especially moving performance. The only disappointing track is the famous *Aria*, which comes over in a curiously jerky and disconnected manner.

That apart, the playing is mostly top-notch, with the Tonbridge Marcussen ideally suited to Peeters's clear contrapuntal voice-leading. Beautifully recorded, with excellent notes by David Gammie.

Malcolm Riley

## G Prokofiev

Import/Export

Powerplant / Joby Burgess *perc*

Nonclassical © 2 (CD + DVD) NONCLSS007  
(64' + 70' • DDD)

DVD features live performance of Import/Export with video projections and photography by Kathy Hinde  
**Found objects and found sounds offer a telling commentary on globalisation**



Among the growing crop of composer-led labels, Gabriel Prokofiev's Nonclassical is surely among the most forward-looking.

Its latest release focuses on *Import/Export*: a "Suite for Global Junk" written for Powerplant, the multimedia project of percussionist Joby Burgess who performs on objects synonymous with the process of globalisation. Oil drums, plastic bags, soda bottles and wooden pallets are deployed – along with a minimal amount of electronic looping – in seven "voyages" and an epilogue. The half-hour journey proves diverse and unpredictable – tracks redolent of an earlier era in percussion music (namely Cage and Cowell) contrasting with those in which the performer's improvisational powers come provocatively the fore. *Import/Export* is that rare achievement: music wholly sufficient in itself that is shot through with the cultural fall-out which inspired it.

The package, stylishly presented, offers two ways of experiencing it. The CD complements the piece with seven remixes in a suite of comparable length, ranging from left-field dance numbers to ominous soundscapes that readily intensify the feel of the originals. The DVD features a visual realisation by Kathy Hinde, setting images of it in performance alongside those of the environs and cultures at the receiving end of globalisation. Additional features consist of Burgess performing the piece in Bath, and two 1950s documentaries that chart the exploration and benefits of oil production in

the heyday of the American boom. Whichever way, *Import/Export* provides sobering viewing as well as stimulating listening, for both of which those involved can take great credit. More power to them!

Richard Whitehouse

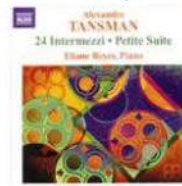
## Tansman

24 Intermezzos. Petite Suite. Valse-Impromptu

Eliane Reyes *pf*

Naxos © 8 572266 (57' • DDD)

**The piano music of a Pole in Paris, coloured by wartime conditions**



Time was when only the merest fraction of music was available on record. Today the situation could hardly be more different. Every nook and cranny is

offered up for scrutiny, and so it is that Eliane Reyes, a young and wonderfully gifted pianist, gives us a world premiere recording of Alexandre Tansman's 24 Intermezzos and *Petite Suite*, and, as an accessible encore, the *Valse-Impromptu*.

The first two of the four books of the Intermezzos (1939–40) were composed in Paris, their mood dictated by dispiriting wartime conditions and reflecting a curious slant on Romanticism. Brief, fluid and exotic, they are alive with many unnerving twists of harmony and direction. Gérard Hugon's long and scholarly notes suggest parallels with a wide selection of composers (*en passant* he mentions Brahms, Fauré, Chopin, Szymanowski, Bartók and Ravel), and yet it is difficult to feel that Tansman's mercurial figurations are complemented by sufficient melodic distinction. The overall mood of all the Intermezzos is claustrophobic and introspective, and you will look in vain for much lightening of mood. The extensive *lamentoso* of Book 4 No 3 is, however, undeniably powerful, reflecting in its desolation something of Scriabin's late and morbidly obsessive style. Elsewhere the writing, while outwardly varied, is too often confined within a narrow range of intervals. But Eliane Reyes takes a different view and her performances are memorably refined, dextrous and committed. She is excellently recorded and this is clearly a disc for explorers.

Bryce Morrison

## SL Weiss

Overture in B flat. Partita in G minor. Sonata

in F. Fantasie in C minor. Suite in C minor.

Ciaccona in E flat

Nigel North *lte*

BGS Records © BGS119 (66' • DDD)

## R Johnson

The Prince's Almain, Masque and Coranto.

Pavans – No 1; No 2; No 3; No 4. Galliard: My



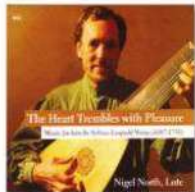
## Instrumental reviews

Lady Mildmay's Delight. Two Almains. The Noble Man. The Witches' Dance. Three Almains. The Fairies' Dance. Fantasie. Galliard. Lady strange's Almain. The First, Second and Third Dances in the Prince's Masque. The Satyre's Dance

**Nigel North** *lute*

Naxos © 8 572178 (60' • DDD)

**A master lutenist in the music of two of the instrument's finest composers**



With his two latest releases, lutenist Nigel North again demonstrates the range and persuasiveness of his art as he explores the music of two composers perhaps less well known than their respective countrymen John Dowland and JS Bach, to both of whom North has already paid homage



in fine style with four-CD sets.

Robert Johnson (c1583-1633) was a lutenist at the court of James I who wrote songs and dances for the plays of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Webster, as well as for the masques of Ben Jonson. Sylvius Leopold Weiss (1687-1750), an almost exact contemporary of his friend and collaborator JS Bach, served as a royal chamber musician to the Elector August II of Saxony and was renowned in his day as one of the supreme masters of the lute.

Both Johnson and Weiss made the simple dance form a vehicle for the loftiest expression – notably the pavane in Johnson's case and the allemande in Weiss's. North in his interpretations is not embarrassed to do likewise – this is especially true with the Weiss, recorded as it was after an *annus horribilis* which saw North's mother pass away, his former wife and friend Mary die of cancer, and his suffering a heart attack.

While the Johnson presents in a musically satisfying order pavans, galliards, almains and dances specifically written for the theatre, the Weiss features three suites of Baroque dances. The disc opens with the sunny Overture in B flat, while the Suite in C minor is effectively bookended by the Fantasie in C minor and the Ciaccona in E flat.

For the Johnson, North plays a 10-course lute by Lars Jönsson (2005); for the Weiss, an 11-course lute, again by Jönsson, after Hans Frei. As always, North's playing is a wonder, an easy, natural musicality and an impeccable technique complemented by a real ear for colour and nuance of expression.

Best of all, there's an intensity of emotion here that equals Matthew Wadsworth's in the

Johnson and Jacob Lindberg's in the Weiss: the pavans and allemandes are grave and searching, the almains and courantes are bursting with vigour and the theatre dances are richly characterised, while the sarabandes and minuets are suffused with a piquant saudade. Superb.

**William Yeoman**

## 'Fantasies for Piano'

**Schumann** Fantasie, Op 17 **Mozart** Fantasia, K397 **Beethoven** Fantasia, Op 77 **Scriabin** Fantasie, Op 28 **Horowitz** Carmen Fantasy **Marylin Frascone** *pf*

Integral © INT221174 (58' • DDD)

**Impassioned and improvisatory (but perhaps not intoxicating) fantasies**



In reviewing Marilyn Frascone's disc of Liszt and Ravel last year (5/10), I compared her unfavourably with Boris Berezovsky in the B minor Sonata and,

though equipped with a strong technique, thought she showed too little imagination in *Gaspard* to rival any benchmarks. Here, by contrast, in this attractive programme, she establishes her credentials as a thinking virtuoso, not least in the opening Schumann, an account which I enjoyed as much as Uchida's recent impassioned reading (Decca, 12/10), if not more. Frascone's is a more wistful, intimate view of the work, its final pages touchingly conveyed, becoming ever more fraught before subsiding into reluctant acceptance.

She makes an equally poignant narrative of Mozart's very different Fantasy followed by Beethoven's all-too-rarely-heard Fantasy in G minor, capturing the work's improvisatory character with grace and lucid phrasing. In Frascone's hands, however, Scriabin's powerfully projected B minor Fantasy (1900) emerges as strenuous and relentless. Its intoxicating delirium, memorably recorded by Heinrich Neuhaus in 1953, eludes her. The final item is an assured *Carmen Fantasy* (the 1968 "Carnegie Hall" version), though not one that rises to the dizzying delights of Volodos, Matsuev or the Master himself.

Frascone's biography states that her earlier discs have been "duly noted and prized by the specialist press (English *Gramophone Magazine*...)". Duly noted also was the litany of solecisms in the English translation of her Liszt/Ravel booklet. The Fantasy booklet offers a further selection at no extra cost. I enjoyed reading that "Horowitz recorded a first version of his *Carmen Fantasy* from 1926 on Welte-Mignon rolls [*sic*], before burning it for 78 revolutions two years later..."

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## 'The Viennese School'

'Teachers & Followers, Vol 2'

**Blitzstein** Piano Sonata **Cage** Variations I

**Harrison** Sarabande **Kirchner** Little Suite

**Prawossudowitsch** Primitivi, Op 17 **Schacht**

Kinderstücke **Schmid** Widmungen, Op 9

**Schoenberg** Klavierstücke – Op 33*a*; Op 33*b*

**Skalkottas** Suite No 3

**Steffen Schleiermacher** *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG613 1434-2 (66' • DDD)

**Music by Schoenberg and his students, not all of whom followed his example**



Admirable though Steffen Schleiermacher's enterprise is, in ferreting out obscure compositions by some of the many who studied with Schoenberg, this

selection (recorded in a rather clangorous church acoustic) underlines the fact that only a few of those students went on to compositional distinction and by no means all of those wrote "Schoenbergian" music.

The six short *Primitivi* by Natalia Prawossudowitsch (1899-1988) were composed just before she encountered Schoenberg in Berlin and are closer to Prokofiev or Bartók than to anything (Austro-)German. The best that can be said is that they don't outstay their welcome. The same is true of *Widmungen* by Erich Schmid (1907-2000), who eventually found success as conductor rather than composer, and the rather un-childlike *Kinderstücke* by Peter Schacht (1901-45). The Little Suite (1949) by Leon Kirchner (1919-2009) is also a very desultory affair, embodying a rather wishy-washy neo-classicism closer to some Hindemith than to any Schoenberg.

In their very different ways, both Nikos Skalkottas and Marc Blitzstein were among the more accomplished and characterful of Schoenberg's students, though Skalkottas's Suite No 3 is a rather rough and ready example of his work. Blitzstein's Sonata (1927) is perhaps all the better for being more Stravinskian than Schoenbergian, while Lou Harrison's equally un-Schoenberg-like *Sarabande* (1937) was written five years before he attended classes with the master. When it comes to reactions against the great father-figure, however, none was more thoroughgoing than John Cage: the version of *Variations I* (1958) which Schleiermacher offers is a refreshing antidote to the neo-classicism prevalent elsewhere.

The two short Schoenberg pieces placed first on this disc provide masterclasses in the presentation of purposeful yet poetically imaginative substance: qualities that other composers might occasionally match but which could never be taught, even by Schoenberg.

**Arnold Whittall**



## ROUND-UP

## Key repertoire

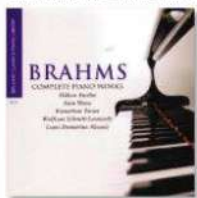
**Jed Distler** sifts through some generous box-sets aimed at pianophiles

The following releases in Brilliant Classics' budget box-set Piano Library series represent both the best and worst of the label's seemingly haphazard artists and repertoire agenda. This especially applies to a collection devoted to **Rachmaninov's** complete piano works. Good, solid 1985 performances of the two-piano works by Ingrid Thorson and Julian Thurber are hampered by harsh and blurry sonics, in contrast to the airless, tack-



piano ambience that renders Michael Ponti's monochrome Vox recording of the Op 10 *Morceaux de salon* decidedly uneasy on the ear. At least the *Etudes tableaux* are agreeably served via Nikolai Lugansky's sense of style and rhetorical breadth, although the young Garrick Ohlsson's cutting-edge brilliance in his 1975 transcriptions recording holds stronger appeal. Yet while Santiago Rodriguez's Preludes, sonatas and variation sets are erratically engineered, this underrated pianist's sense of authority and cumulative power force you to listen with fresh ears. I only wish he had recorded the Second Sonata's earlier, more sprawling version together with the leaner 1931 revision presented here.

An eight-disc assemblage purporting to encompass **Brahms's** 'complete piano works' is not quite that. For example, an earlier Brilliant



Brahms piano music box contained the solo version of the Op 39 Waltzes, excluded here, while the teenage

Hélène Grimaud's lean and powerful accounts of the Second and Third Sonatas have been replaced by Alan Weiss's better-engineered yet less individually compelling traversals. Kamerhan Turan turns in a lithe and glittering performance of the First Sonata that transforms this music into something far more graceful and supple than its unwieldy textures usually suggest. Two discs are given over to miscellaneous transcriptions, studies and short pieces, all played by Louis Demetrius Alvanis. Although his *Hungarian Dances* could use more audacity and panache, check out his supple and exquisitely shaded treatment of the study based on Schubert's E flat Impromptu, where the left hand takes over the rapid, continuous right-hand triplets. But what you really want this set for is Håkon Austbø's lyrical beauty and finely honed contrapuntal awareness in the Op 10 Ballades and late piano pieces. Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy's superb technical and musical command holds unflinching interest throughout the variation sets, which easily hold their own among the top versions available.

Schmitt-Leonardy's colourful, seamlessly integrated account of the *Variations sérieuses* and



ravishingly chiseled Op 16 Caprices stand out among his contributions to a four-disc **Mendelssohn** box. Pieter-Jelle de Boer is solid but studio-bound in the E major Op 6 Sonata and E minor Op 35 Prelude and Fugue, but if you don't mind a generally soft-grained approach and middle-of-the-road attitude towards tempo extremes, Frank van der Laar's complete survey of the *Songs Without Words* will satisfy.

Wouldn't it have made better marketing sense for Brilliant Classics to present Alfred Brendel's complete Vox solo **Beethoven** cycle under one roof, so to speak, rather than just the sonically and



interpretatively inconsistent sonata recordings? For example, Op 22's drab, boxy acoustic radically differs from Op 90's gorgeously detailed and colourful reproduction, while Brendel veers from fussy and inert (Op 28) to staggeringly alive (Op 31 No 3, Op 101 and the *Appassionata*, Op 57). True, Brendel acolytes will find plenty of grist for the mill when comparing this set to the pianist's two later Philips cycles but if you want all 32 Beethoven sonatas on Brilliant Classics, stick with the stereo Friedrich Gulda cycle.

No qualms, however, about Inna Poroshina's survey of **Dvořák's** complete piano music, last available on the small but enterprising



American label Essay. Why this repertoire gets short shrift is beyond me. Granted, Dvořák doesn't exploit the piano's resources on the virtuoso level of Chopin, Liszt and Brahms. Yet he thoroughly understood the instrument (he was a pianist and organist first before becoming a string player) and was rarely at a loss for first-rate musical ideas. Moreover, Dvořák always reveals a knack for unusual textures and timbral combinations, such as assigning the melody and accompaniment of the C major Mazurka, Op 56 No 2, to the keyboard's



Alfred Brendel: his Beethoven box set is a curate's egg

extreme registers. Listen to the deliciously varied *Silhouettes* (Op 8) or to the 13 pieces encompassing the nearly hour-long *Poetic Tone Pictures* (Op 85) and you'll wonder why performers have no clue that this music exists. To evaluate Poroshina alongside her super-budget-price complete Dvořák rival

Stefan Veselka on Naxos is like comparing apples and oranges. In general, Veselka favours steadier, slower tempi, while Poroshina plays faster, freer and more impulsively, all of which befits the music's intimate scale. The fresh, vibrant engineering doesn't hurt a bit – and neither does the price tag! 🍷

**Rachmaninov** Cpte Pf Wks Franke, D Gardiner, Ghindin, Groslot, Lugansky, Ohlsson, Ponti, S Rodriguez, Thorson, Thurber  
Brilliant Classics © 9192 (ADD/DDD)

**Brahms** Cpte Pf Wks Alvanis, Austbø, Schmitt-Leonardy, Turan, A Weiss  
Brilliant Classics © 94091 (DDD)

**Mendelssohn** Pf Wks Van der Laar, Schmitt-Leonardy, P-J de Boer  
Brilliant Classics © 94084 (DDD)

**Beethoven** Cpte Pf Wks Brendel  
Brilliant Classics © 94075 (ADD)

**Dvořák** Cpte Pf Wks Poroshina  
Brilliant Classics © 94085 (DDD)



# Vocal

Diana Damrau sings Strauss • Kate Royal's lesson in love • Icelandic hymnody

## JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245 – Es ist vollbracht!<sup>1</sup>.

St Matthew Passion, BWV244 – Komm, süsse Kreuz<sup>2</sup>. Sonatas for Viola da gamba and Harpsichord, BWV1027-29

<sup>1</sup>Michael Chance *countertenor*

<sup>2</sup>Harry van der Kamp *bass* Paolo Pandolfo *vda*

François Joubert-Caillet *vion* Markus Hünninger *org* Markus Hünninger *bpd*

Glossa Ⓢ GCD920411 (60' • DDD • T/t)

**Wonderful playing in three gamba sonatas – and wonderful singing, too**



Splendidly played and sung, and beautifully recorded – the balance between harpsichord and gamba in the sonatas could hardly be bettered – these

accounts merit enthusiastic recommendation. It's a wonderful idea to include the arias with viola da gamba obbligato from the *St John* and *St Matthew* Passions. Before listening, I was sceptical about having "Es ist vollbracht" performed without the string band (which should enter for the contrasting middle section) but in fact this track is especially fine, with organ, violone and viol sounding powerful and spirited at the sudden *Allegro*. In the outer sections Chance and Pandolfo match one another in touching, sorrowful expression. "Komm, süsse Kreuz" is very affectingly performed, too, and in the sonatas Hünninger and Pandolfo have the knack of bringing each phrase to life through constantly varied accentuation, articulation and intensity. In the finales of all three sonatas this is complemented by unconstrained rhythmic buoyancy.

However, I do find in two or three movements that this generally admirable sense of freedom goes too far. Eighteenth-century writers such as Quantz recommend slight lengthening of important notes but it's a far cry from this to slamming on the brakes whenever the music turns a corner, as happens in the first *Allegro* of BWV1027, or to the painfully slow, limping walk of the same sonata's *Andante* (even though this is to make room for some amazing improvised ornamentation). You may not, however, react to this as badly as I do, and in any case, such faults are countered by playing of rare imaginative grasp. **Duncan Druce**

## Berg • KA Hartmann

'In the Depths of Night'

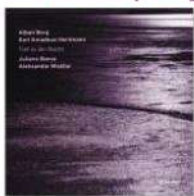
**Berg** Sieben frühe Lieder. Die Näherin. Erster Verlust. Über den Bergen. Winter. Regen. Traurigkeit. Hoffnung. Die Flötenspielerin. Mignon. Schliesse mir die Augen beide – two versions: 1900; 1925 **KA Hartmann** Lamento

Juliane Banse *sop*

Aleksandar Madžar *pf*

ECM Ⓢ 476 3848 (49' • DDD)

**A sorrowful response to German history and the early songs of a 12-note pioneer**



Calling this disc "Tief in der Nacht" establishes a resonant metaphorical link between the not-so-little night music of Alban Berg's early songs and Karl Amadeus

Hartmann's *Lamento*. This three-movement cantata depicts the pervading darkness of 17th-century poet Andreas Gryphius's experience of the Thirty Years War, and had a complex evolution. The 1937 original, involving chorus, was dedicated to Berg's memory (he had died two years before): but in 1955 the three solo soprano movements acquired a new expressive power as part of Hartmann's sorrowful response to recent German history and his own stifled yet intensely felt part in that history.

Paul Griffiths's booklet-notes indicate the relevance of "neo-Baroque" stylistic traits to settings of a poet almost contemporary with Bach. The effect can sound in places like a confrontation between Bergian expressionism and Hindemithian neo-classicism. Hartmann nevertheless makes something strongly shaped and distinctively characterised out of this conjunction, and strength of character also distinguishes this performance by Juliane Banse and Aleksandar Madžar.

Banse and Madžar also find a powerfully dramatic rhetoric in the fervent, sometimes rather congested textures of Berg's early songs, and their juxtaposition of his two settings of Storm's "Schliesse mir die Augen beide" – moving from late Romanticism in 1907 to a textbook 12-note exercise in 1925 – will be very useful for students of 20th-century developments. Yet the particular talents of these artists might have been even better suited to a more adventurous

selection of German songs from the 1930s and 1950s. Given the short playing time, a missed opportunity? **Arnold Whittall**

## Buxtehude • Weckmann

**Buxtehude** Membra Jesu nostri, BuxWV75<sup>1</sup>.

Laudate pueri, Dominum, BuxWV69<sup>2</sup>

**Weckmann** Kommet her zu mir alle<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Emma Kirkby, <sup>2</sup>Elin Manahan Thomas *sops*

<sup>3</sup>Michael Chance *countertenor* Charles Daniels *ten*

<sup>4</sup>Peter Harvey *bass* Purcell Quartet (Catherine Mackintosh, Catherine Weiss *vns* Richard Boothby *brn* Robert Woolley *org*) with Fretwork (Susanna Pell, Robert Boothby, William Hunt, Reiko Ichise, Asako Morikawa, Richard Campbell *viols*)

Chandos Chaconne Ⓢ CHAN0775 (79' • DDD • T/t)

## Buxtehude

'Scandinavian Cantatas'

Praeludium, BuxWV142. Pange lingua gloriosi, BuxWV91. Herren vår Gud, BuxWV40. Ecce nunc benedicite Domino, BuxWV23. Att du Jesu vill mig höra, BuxWV8. Accedite gentes, BuxWV1. Pasacaglia, BuxWV161. Missa alla brevis, BuxWV114. Domine salvum fac regem, BuxWV18

**Theatre of Voices** (Else Torp, Bente Vist *sops*

William Purefoy *countertenor* Adam Riis, Johan

Linderoth *tens* Jakob Bloch Jespersen *bass*);

**The TOV Band** (Peter Spissky, Jesenka Balic Zunic *vns* Rastko Roknic, Joel Sundin *vas* Fredrik Bock *theo* Lars Baunkilde *vion*) / **Paul Hillier**

with **Bine Bryndorf** *org*

Da Capo Ⓢ 6 220534 (59' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

**Music both well known and more obscure by Bach's great predecessor**



Buxtehude's mesmerising Passion cantata cycle *Membra Jesu nostri* (1680) has been recorded frequently by forces either intimate (one voice per part) or a bit larger. This new version by the Purcell Quartet and friends adopts the former approach. Throughout

proceedings, five experienced early music singers give an attractive performance that feels nonchalant and sweeter than some richer melancholic interpretations (such as the spellbinding Netherlands Bach Society – Channel Classics,



6/06); they demonstrate an intuitive madrigalian interplay in Buxtehude's choruses that open (and also conclude) each of the cantatas, although the airiness of the overall blend from voices and instrumentalists conveys more light than shadow and can occasionally seem top-heavy. In numerous short solo passages Emma Kirkby's singing has its customary authority with text and style, even if it struggles to float as effortlessly as it used to; Elin Manahan Thomas is an ideal sparring partner. Michael Chance's singing is typically profound, even if his timbre sounds worn at crucial times. Father Time has little mercy for the most wonderful heroes of the British early music movement but it is still glorious to hear Kirkby and Chance (combined with Thomas) in the opening bars of the chorus "Quid sunt plagae istae" (*Ad manus*). Charles Daniels's soft high tenor has a hushed devotional character and the disc concludes with Peter Harvey's compassionate singing of Matthias Weckmann's *Kommet her zu mir alle* (a setting of Matthew 11:28-30 accompanied sensitively by two violins, three bass viols and continuo). The Purcell Quartet play with reliable stylishness, Fretwork provide an expressive contribution to Buxtehude's extraordinary sixth cantata, *Ad cor*, pronunciation of Latin texts is meticulously Germanic throughout, high pitch is used sensibly (A=470Hz), and Peter Holman provides scholarly notes.

Less familiar fare is explored by Paul Hillier and the Theatre of Voices. Their programme of "Scandinavian Cantatas" presents both of Buxtehude's little-known short works with texts in Swedish and also five works in Latin, including the composer's only *Missa brevis* written in the *stile antico*. Organist Bine Bryndorf has already recorded a survey of Buxtehude's organ music on historic instruments for Dacapo but here she provides two magnificent solo performances played on the organ of St Mary's in Elsinore (where Buxtehude worked from 1660 until 1668, when he got his job for life at St Mary's in Lübeck). The Theatre of Voices convey a compelling atmosphere of drama, commitment and plangent sonorities in Buxtehude's setting of *Pange lingua gloriosi* (a medieval hymn attributed to Thomas Aquinas), and the introductory sonata to the psalm *Ecce nunc benedicite Domino* is played with refined joyfulness. Even though Buxtehude probably did not compose *Accedite gentes*, its text of paraphrased psalms is communicated with vigour and authority. The Swedish *concertato* chorale *Herren vår Gud* is performed eloquently and the lamentful aria *Att du Jesu vill mig böra* is sung sincerely by soprano Else Torp. Dacapo's stunning sound engineering, Kerala Snyder's expert essay and the superb musicianship of the six voices (personnel almost identical to



A new recording finds depth beyond the nickname

## *A drunkard's* SOBRIETY

### Clemens non Papa

Missa pro defunctis. De profundis. Erravi sicut ovis. Heu mihi, Domine. Peccantem me quotidie. Tristia et anxietas. Vae tibi Babylon et Syria. Vox in Rama

Brabant Ensemble / Stephen Rice

Hyperion © CDA67848 (73' • DDD • T/T)



For years it was suspected that some sort of joke lay behind the sobriquet "non Papa" that so often attaches to Clemens's name in contemporary sources. And so it's proved, with a recently recovered document describing him as a confirmed drunkard and an all-round bad lot. At least one prospective employer (the heir to the Holy Roman Empire, no less) was thus put off from offering him employment, yet fellow composers wrote moving elegies at his passing. It's been nearly 25 years since the Tallis Scholars first devoted an entire recording to him, and the pieces here

contrast neatly with the somewhat bland music of the earlier offering. His setting of the Mass for the Dead understandably gets top billing, for despite its modest scale and simplicity, it is an affecting piece, as its opening movements signally testify. The Brabant Ensemble sing this with admirable clarity, assisted by a very transparent acoustic and recorded sound image.

The accompanying motets are all penitential in character. As extended pieces, they show off a different side to Clemens, compositionally. A recurring feature is his fondness for extended sequences by way of conclusion and other forms of repetition. This, and the uniformity of tone due to the penitential subject matter, means that the disc is perhaps better sampled than sat through. But it's typical even of the better-known pieces that their fame has been based more on reputation than performance; and although one might have wished for more variety of content and delivery, Clemens and this recording are both worth hearing.

Fabrice Fitch



## Vocal reviews

Hillier's Schütz cycle with Ars Nova (Copenhagen) and seven instrumentalists (led immaculately by violinist Peter Spissky) make this easy to recommend enthusiastically.

David Vickers

### Caresana • Ziani

**Caresana** La Veglia. Demonio, Angelo e tre pastori. Sembri stella felice, Partenope leggiadra. L'Adoratione de' Maggi **Ziani** Sonatas, Op 7 – No 15; No 17

**Maria Grazia Schiavo, Valentina Varriale** *sops*  
**Filippo Mineccia** *countertenor* **Giuseppe De Vittorio, Rosario Totaro** *tens* **Giuseppe Naviglio** *bass* **I Turchini / Antonio Florio**  
Glossa © GCD 922601 (69' • DDD)

**Obscure but engaging cantatas by a Venetian composer in Naples**



Venetian tenor **Cristoforo Caresana** (c1640-1709) performed in several operas by Cavalli but in 1658 he moved to Naples to become a singer,

organist and composer at the vice-regal chapel and the local Oratorio dei Girolamini (to whom he bequeathed his music library). Dinko Fabris's essay asserts that Caresana was one of the finest and most important composers of sacred music in late-17th-century Naples in the years before the Sicilian maestro Alessandro Scarlatti arrived in 1683: he was a close colleague of Provenzale, frequent provider of music to the Tesoro di San Gennaro (a prestigious chapel in the city's cathedral), and a respected teacher at the Conservatorio di Sant'Onofri.

Neapolitan specialists I Turchini and Antonio Florio have contributed substantially to reviving Caresana's reputation. On this occasion they present four of the composer's sacred works interleaved by melancholic sonatas by his teacher Ziani. *Sembri stella felice, Partenope leggiadra* (written for one of the several feast-days of San Gennaro in 1703) is sung with impressive brilliance and feeling by Maria Grazia Schiavo. *La Veglia* (1674) features robust accompaniments from a percussionist; perhaps Florio wished to reinforce Caresana's use of dance-forms and lend it a Florentine festive atmosphere, but the most vigorous clattering does not serve the music ideally. However, the musicianship of I Turchini's string players and singers is beguiling; a beautiful sleep aria ("Dormi o ninno") is sung eloquently by Giuseppe Naviglio. The short oratorio *Demonio, Angelo e tre pastori* (1676) is a dramatically engaging argument between five shepherds outside Bethlehem, two of whom happen to be the resentful Lucifer and a serene Angel in disguise. *L'Adoratione de' Maggi* (also 1676) colourfully depicts a similar dramatic scene between two happy soprano angels, a

complaining bass Devil and three middle-voiced Magi worshipping the infant Christ. This is another fascinating contribution to Florio and I Turchini's admirable discography of obscure Neapolitan gems.

David Vickers

### Cifra • Donati

**Anonymous** Dum esset rex. Beata mater. Nigra sum. Iam hiems transiit. Vestimentum tuum. Quae est ista. Beata es Maria **Cifra** Loreto Vespers **Donati** Domine, ad adiuvandum a 12 **Ensemble Officium; Instrumenta Musica / Wilfried Rombach**  
Christophorus © CHR77321 (67' • DDD • T/t)

**Strikingly good music from a refined and talented minor master**



I confess that I'd never heard of Antonio Cifra (1584-1629), for 20 years from 1609 until his death the master of the chapel of Loreto Basilica, or his music.

To say that it is strikingly good just perhaps qualifies as understatement. It may not quite catch fire in the way that the music of other relatively obscure, recently rescued figures of Monteverdi's time has done (think of Johann Rosenmüller), but here none the less is a composer who handles both *prima* and *seconda prattica* with consummate ease and a degree of refinement, as the *Magnificat* that concludes these *Loreto Vespers* amply demonstrates. The same is true of the psalm settings, several of them in *concertato* style, and the lovely motet *Quae est ista*, which is freely composed.

Ensemble Officium have, to my knowledge, only rarely ventured this late but they do so with very pleasing results. It's very rare that Cifra's demands get the better of the singers when they are called on as soloists in *concertato* movements and the instrumental ensemble plays with a zest and confidence that matches the music's consistently sunny disposition. The recording is full and atmospheric, too; anyone interested in this period should investigate this without hesitation. **Fabrice Fitch**

### B Lang

*Die Sterne des Hungers*<sup>3</sup>.  
*Monadologie VII...for Arnold*

<sup>3</sup>**Sabine Lutzenberger** *mez*

**Klangforum Wien /**

**Sylvain Cambreling**

Kairos © 0013092KAI (73' • DDD • T/t)

**Mechanics, memories and Machaut suffuse this ultra-modern music**



That supremely dystopian Austrian novelist Thomas Bernhard once described Christine Lavant's writing as "testimony to a destroyed

world". In building *Die Sterne des Hungers* ("The Stars of Hunger") around poems by Lavant, the Austrian composer Bernhard Lang (b1957) offers his own testimony but in the form of a resistance to destructiveness in which mechanical strategies (the very acme of the modern) confront the inescapable force of memory, that most personal, psychological index of human identity.

*Die Sterne des Hungers* (2007) might begin with starved, chilled sounds and with memories of another text, Machaut's *Ma fin est mon commencement*. But even before the commencement of its dramatically sustained vocal line it turns wild and loud, perhaps in homage to Lang's jazz-playing past, and as if attempting to shake off the suggestion of memory as reverence. Sabine Lutzenberger has the ideal mixture of roughness and smoothness to convey Lang's dislocated treatment of Lavant's words, and this, together with instrumental textures that move between starkness and delicacy with a very un-random sense of control, makes *Die Sterne des Hungers* a mightily potent example of late modernism, 21st-century style.

*Monadologie VII...for Arnold* (2009) is no less troubled by memory – specifically, by Arnold Schoenberg's long-unfinished Chamber Symphony No 2. The oppressive atmosphere here is so powerful that even if you don't recognise the specific allusions to Schoenberg's music, a sense of the late-Romantic style as a burden that can never be completely got rid of should be unmistakable. Lang's mechanistic rejection of refinement battles with the suffused distillations projected from his hyperactive relation to the potent musical past. Vividly recorded in performances of the greatest concentration and technical skill, this disc is a fine vindication of Kairos's enlightened attitude to A&R. **Arnold Whittall**

### Mendelssohn

Symphony No 2, 'Lobgesang', Op 52

**Ruth Ziesak, Mojca Erdmann** *sops* **Christian Elsner** *ten* **MDR Radio Choir; MDR Symphony Orchestra / Jun Märkl**

Naxos © 8 572294 (69' • DDD • T/t)

*Selected comparisons:*

Bergen PO, Litton (9/09) (BIS) BIS-SACD1704

Heidelberg SO, Fey (6/10) (HANS) CD98 577

**Mendelssohn's much-maligned choral symphony in a persuasive reading**



No work of Mendelssohn has soared so high and sunk so low as this symphony-cantata composed for the Leipzig celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of Gutenberg's invention of the printing press with movable type. What the early Victorians heard as noble and uplifting gradually came to seem by turns grandiloquent and complacent.



Reflecting the general rise in Mendelssohn's stock in recent years, the *Hymn of Praise* can now be enjoyed, in a lively and sympathetic performance, for its stirring choruses that unashamedly proclaim their debt to Handel, its distinctive vein of lyricism that mingles innocence and poignancy, and for the thrilling drama of the dialogue with the Watchman.

A prime challenge in this work is finding a balance between ceremonial dignity and that urgent forward momentum crucial to the composer. Jun Märkl's very smart tempo for the opening brass motto, *con moto* with a vengeance, suggests that this is going to be a performance in the mould of those by Andrew Litton and Thomas Fey. The nimble, eager *Allegro*, shorn of any hint of pomposity, bears this out, though Märkl is more romantically flexible than his rivals in the lyrical second theme. I was, though, less convinced by the other two instrumental movements: the delightful *Allegretto*, somewhere between a Venetian gondola song and a Tchaikovsky waltz, has a wistful charm but at Märkl's ultra-relaxed tempo misses Mendelssohn's prescribed *un poco agitato*, while the *Adagio religioso* is treated with a dangerous, Brucknerian expansiveness that only just avoids sentimentality. Phrasing in longer spans at tempi close to the composer's swiftish metronome marking, both Litton and Fey preserve an essential Mendelssohnian innocence here.

Märkl is also slower than Litton and Fey in several of the vocal numbers, though, with sensitive shading, the idyllic chorus "All thee that cried unto the Lord in distress" arguably gains from the more reflective tempo. Elsewhere he shrewdly judges the balance between dignity and urgency, while the choral singing (with a notably incisive tenor line) is aptly full-blooded without compromising clarity in Mendelssohn's fugal textures. Of the soloists, Christian Elsner, his tone poised between the lyric and heroic, sings in fine, forthright style, if without quite the imaginative subtlety of Christoph Prégardien for Litton. Ruth Ziesak's voice has touching plangency, though her slight shrillness *in alt* makes her response to the tenor's fearful "Will the night soon pass?" less ecstatically radiant than it can be (Fey's Eleonore Marguerre is ideal here). Ziesak and Mojca Erdmann combine attractively in the famous, and oft-maligned, duet "I waited for the Lord", which emerges with freshness and charm despite the leisurely tempo. While this would not be my first choice (Litton would get my vote, just, over Fey and the older recordings by Abbado on DG and Chailly on Philips), this new Leipzig performance, finely played and sung, and spaciouly recorded, could win over many doubters to Mendelssohn's splendid symphony-cum-cantata. At the Naxos price it's a true bargain. **Richard Wigmore**



A fine singer in Schubert's poignant final songs

## Swan UPPING

### Schubert

Schwanengesang, D957

Thomas Oliemans bar Malcolm Martineau pf  
Et cetera © KTC1420 (69' • DDD • T/I)



Appreciating that readers look to reviews for answers rather than supplementary questions, one is reluctant to open on a note of crucial uncertainty. It has long been so, but I am finding it ever harder to know what to believe about recorded voices. I have as yet to hear this well-known Dutch baritone (age, he tells us, 32) "in the flesh". And the voice certainly has fine qualities – firm, ample, responsive to all the demands for control, technical and expressive, placed upon it. But, as I am hearing it now, it acquires a layer of hardness, impurity, often at anything more than a *mezzo-forte*. This is the more noticeable because it is unusual in a baritone. My belief is that, were I now to go and hear him "in the flesh", I would

indeed find something corresponding to this but in nothing like so troublesome a degree. As I say, this is nothing new, but it seems to have reached the stage where recording and reproduction take a pride – almost the trademark of their "state of the art"-ness – in picking up what are really comparatively minor flaws in the singing and revealing them in a way that is out of proportion to their effect "in the flesh". Of course (and this is another worrisome consideration) the ear grows accustomed: I mention it now, apropos this disc rather than another, probably because I listened to the recital in separate groups, each time returning with the ear relatively unprepared.

Oliemans is, however, an exceptionally fine singer. Some of the performances – "In der Ferne", "Im Frühling" and "Am Meer" for example – rank with the best. Malcolm Martineau's contribution is beyond estimate, so strong and yet sensitive, always a special creation of his own while never losing its true Schubertian identity.

**John Steane**



## Monteverdi • Marazzoli

**Marazzoli** *La fiera di Farfa* **Monteverdi**

Hor che'l ciel e la terra. Lamento della Ninfa.  
Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda

**Le Poème Harmonique / Vincent Dumestre**

Alpha ② ALPHA172 (72' • DDD • T/D)

**An intermedio whose comedy and parody spills over into Monteverdi**



The music of Monteverdi and Marazzoli is rarely heard in close proximity but the pieces chosen on this imaginative coupling are musically connected in a surprising way. *La fiera di Farfa*, composed as an *intermedio* for the 1639 revival of Virgilio Mazzochi's opera *Chi soffre spera*, includes a realistic market scene complete with street cries, folksongs and dances. From eyewitnesses we learn that oxen, mules and horses were all present on the stage (in the search for hyper-realism and comedy presumably), and taking their cue from this, Vincent Dumestre's ensemble have produced a vivacious and highly characterised account. Indeed, with such an astonishing variety of animal noises, not to mention characters from the *commedia dell'arte* to cope with, it is difficult to imagine how they ever managed to get to the end of the recording session.

Then, as *La fiera* draws to a close, two of the comic characters parody Monteverdi's *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, which had been published just one year earlier in the Eighth Book of Madrigals. This naturally leads to *Il combattimento* itself, given here in a highly rhetorical reading which involves a great deal of improvised ornamentation, notably to the arioso section beginning with the words "Notte, che nel profondo oscuro seno". The pros and cons of doing this are well enough known, and for all the evident virtuosity of Jan van Elsacker's rendering, the result will not please everyone. Risk-taking also occurs in *Hor che'l ciel e la terra*, whose magical opening is taken at a pace that, as it dictates the speed of what follows, perhaps compromises the sense of overall architecture. **Iain Fenlon**

## L Paminger • S Paminger

**L Paminger** Domine, ne in furore tuo (Psalm 38).  
Descendi in hortum meum. Virgo prudentissima.  
Sicut lillium inter spinas. Disce crucem. In exitu  
Israel de Aegypto (Psalms 114 & 115). Pater  
noster. Ad te, Domine, levavi (Psalm 25).  
Dixit Dominus (Psalm 110). O Trinitas

**S Paminger** O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross  
**Stimmwerck** (Franz Vitzthum *counterten* Klaus  
Wenk, Gerhard Hölzle *tens* Marcus Schmidl *bass*)  
with **David Erler** *counterten*

Christophorus ② CHR77331 (72' • DDD • T/D)

**A minor 16th-century master gets his 15 minutes of fame – deservedly so**



Well, it's more like 70 minutes, but in general terms Andy Warhol's dictum holds true here: no disrespect intended to Leonhard Paminger (1495-1567),

who was, as the informative booklet-notes tell us, one of the most prolific composers of the 16th century, and whose works were published after his death in 1567 by his sons, rather as Lassus's sons were to do a generation later. In the event, only four volumes out of a projected 10 were issued; none the less, they testify to a composer of real worth, a reminder of the generally high standard of compositional technique in the mid-16th century.

If all this gives the impression of a composer of only specialist interest, Stimmwerck's performances elevate this project to a perceptibly higher level: tuning, ensemble co-ordination and tone are of a very high order, and Franz Vitzthum, the ensemble's countertenor, is to be commended for hitting high notes consistently sweetly and with not a hint of strain. If anything is missing, it is a greater variety in expression and delivery, though in fairness the same might be said of Paminger himself, for all his unimpeachable craftsmanship. Among the more extended pieces, however, *Disce crucem* is sure-footed in pacing and varied in its materials; among the shorter, the setting of the Lord's Prayer and the wonderfully gentle Song of Songs motet *Descendi in hortum meum*, with its surprising ending, are beautifully judged and persuasively delivered. **Fabrice Fitch**

## A Scarlatti

Benedicta et venerabilis es<sup>a</sup>. Mortales non auditis<sup>b</sup>. Nisi Dominus<sup>c</sup>. Salve regina<sup>d</sup>. Toccata<sup>e</sup>.  
Toccata VIII<sup>e</sup>. Varie partite obbligate al basso<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>cd **Gemma Bertagnolli**, <sup>abc</sup> **Adriana Fernandez** *sops*

<sup>a</sup>cd **Sara Mingardo** *contr* <sup>abc</sup> **Martin Oro** *counterten*

<sup>a</sup>cd **Furio Zanasi** *bar* <sup>abc</sup> **Antonio Abete** *bass*

<sup>a</sup>cd **Concerto de' Cavalieri / Marcello Di Lisa**

with **Andrea Coen** *org*

CPO ② CPO777 476-2 (68' • DDD)

**Small forces prove effective in sacred works by Scarlatti père**



Concerto de' Cavalieri present four of Alessandro Scarlatti's sacred works written in the modern *stile concertante*. Marcello

Di Lisa's use of only six singers, including elaborate solo contributions by both sopranos, and an assertive yet modestly scaled orchestra is sensible historically and stylish artistically. *Benedicta et venerabilis es* was written in July 1720 for the Carmelite feast of the Blessed Virgin at S Maria in Monte Santo, Rome – the same church and celebration for which Handel had written music about

13 years earlier. The scale and tone feel just right, with lyrical violin passages (solo and ripieno), alert consort singing and impressive solo contributions from a team that includes several eminent Italian specialists.

The core of the disc contrasts two motets for soprano, alto, strings and continuo. A setting of *Salve regina* has shades of the later style of Pergolesi in devout duet passages (eg "Ad te suspiramus"), but its uncertain attribution to Scarlatti does nothing to hinder empathetic singing by Sara Mingardo and Gemma Bertagnolli; the latter's dramatic "Ad te clamamus" is some of the finest singing I've heard from her. The other Marian motet, *Mortales non auditis*, is assigned to Adriana Fernandez and Martin Oro; their animated singing is only a shade less impressive than their colleagues' but the casting decision shrewdly shares the spoils evenly among the performers.

Proceedings conclude with one of Scarlatti's three extant settings of *Nisi Dominus*: Bertagnolli and Mingardo sing *concertante* parts spiritedly, with the other four singers forming a sensitive ripieno chorus; the effect is splendid in fast music but especially beguiling in the slow contrapuntal chorus "Qui manducatis". Interludes between the four featured vocal works are played charismatically by Andrea Coen on the 17th-century organ in the Basilica di S Giovanni Battista dei Fiorentini, Rome. Highly recommended. **David Vickers**

## Schubert

Winterreise, D911

**Peter Harvey** *bar* **Gary Cooper** *fp*

Linn ② Linn CKD371 (74' • DDD/DSD • T/D)

## Schubert

Winterreise, D911

**Christian Hilz** *bar* **Eckart Sellheim** *fp*

Brilliant Classics ② 94053 (64' • DDD • T/T)

**Fortepiano accompanied performances with a world of difference between them**



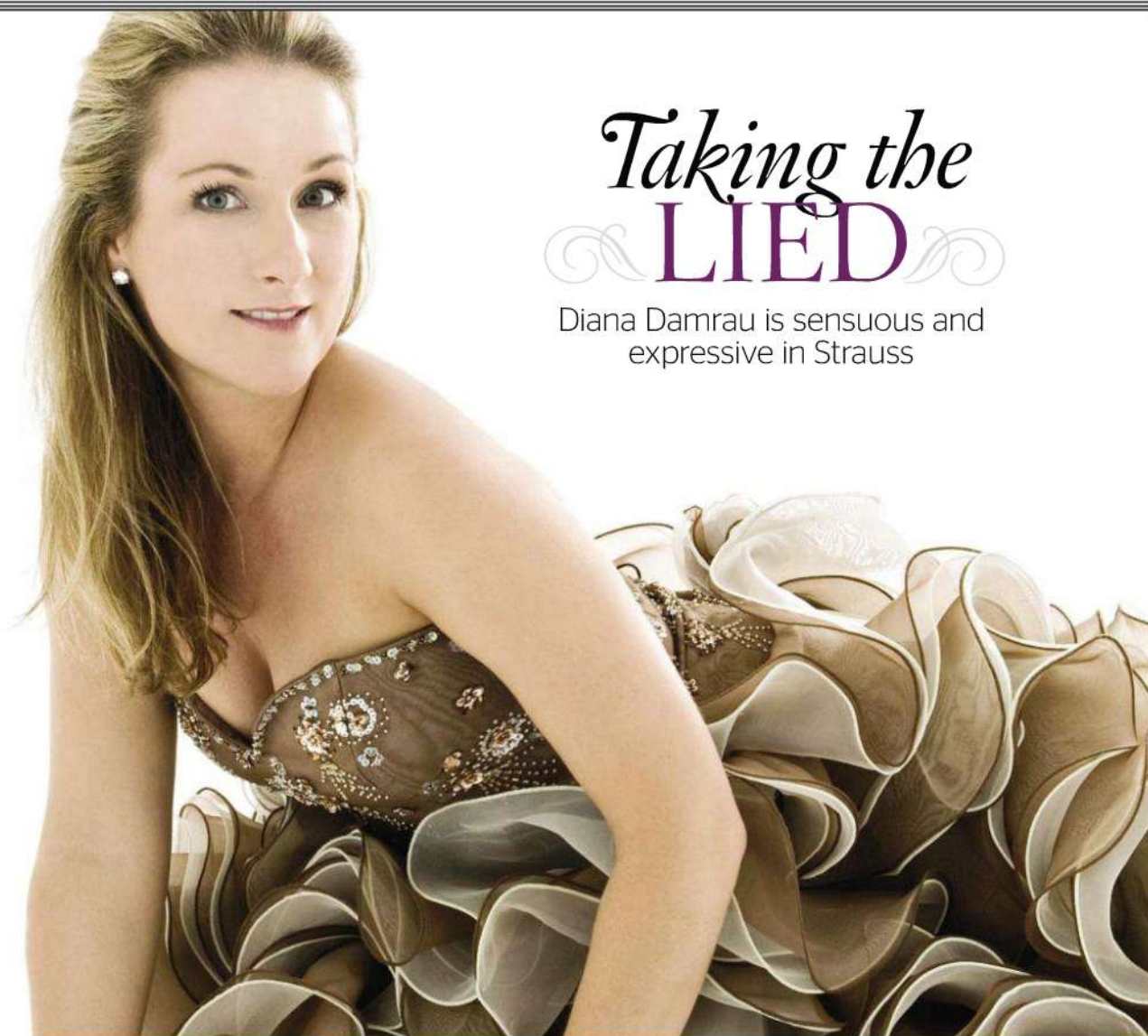
Peter Harvey is a baritone whose name has become familiar over the last few years, mostly in association with Bach and with his concert work abroad, principally in France. Introducing himself now as a Lied singer on record with *Winterreise* might be seen as presumptuous but, if so, no such thought occurred to me

during the course of a performance which arouses sympathy from the start and never forfeits that rare and special kind of interest which is brought into play only with a sense of complete and urgent identification between the composition and its performers. The



# Taking the LIED

Diana Damrau is sensuous and expressive in Strauss



## R Strauss

Sechs Lieder, Op 68. Acht Lieder aus letzte Blätter, Op 10 – No 1, Zueignung; No 8, Allerseelen. Vier Lieder, Op 27 – No 2, Cäcilie; No 4, Morgen!. Fünf Lieder, Op 48 – No 1, Freundliche Vision; No 4, Winterweihe. Heimkehr, Op 15 No 5. Ständchen, Op 17 No 2. Traum durch die Dämmerung, Op 29 No 1. Das Rosenband, Op 36 No 1. Meinem Kinde, Op 37 No 3. Wiegenlied, Op 41 No 1. Muttertändelei, Op 43 No 2. Des Dichters Abendgang, Op 47 No 2. Waldseligkeit, Op 49 No 1. Das Bächlein, Op 88 No 1

**Diana Damrau** sop **Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Christian Thielemann**  
Virgin © 628664-5 (71' • DDD • T/D)

The tone is set, very agreeably, by the Op 68 songs in their initial mode of Zerbinetta-Ariel radiance and freedom. They are not performed as a group but with one chosen to open the programme, two to lighten its passage en route and two others in



a weightier manner to bring about its conclusion. Such a framework suggests a unity of purpose but a flexibility of mood and style also. And it

extends the singer's role: she is not merely a fair-weather soprano. Darker shades, more serious tones lie within her expressive scope than one might at first suppose.

Much is accomplished. In matters of expressiveness and coloration we have only to wait for the second song, "Waldseligkeit", to hear how a sensuous mystery falls like a veil at the words "Und unter ihren Zweigen", and then, a little later, to find the tone refreshed as though in the clear waters of the silver-bright brook in "Das Bächlein", which follows. Familiar songs such as "Ständchen" gain new life with a smiling intimacy of approach in the first verse and an enriched

suggestiveness as dusk falls in the third. Then, with the longest and most turbulent of the songs, "Lied der Frauen", the dramatic range is intensified, both of the songs themselves and of the voice as we have hitherto known it.

Most characteristic is the beautiful quality of the head-tones used to such lovely effect in "Morgen", "Freundliche Vision" and "Traum durch die Dämmerung". In "Wiegenlied" the *legato* is less consistent, perhaps in response to the stippling movement of the violin obbligato. More warmth and tenderness would be welcome here; more repose in "Der Rosenband" also, and in other songs the tone is a little more prickly and uneven than I personally would wish. Oddly, too, I sometimes found myself wishing away the luxury of orchestrations – and that in spite of the fine work of the Munich players and the sensitive direction of Christian Thielemann. **John Steane**



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other recording, I'm afraid, can be used in a combined review such as this only to point up the exceptional merits of its competitor. They are of a kind that comparison inevitably brings to the fore, going to the heart of Lieder singing – that is, to the heart itself. Hilz and Sellheim set out on their journey as though with a proclamation that they have no heart. They step out briskly with determination to keep moving; by comparison Harvey and Cooper are almost laid-back in movement and manner. But almost immediately the regularity of movement by the first pair begins to suggest nothing more than insensibility. While at every phrase in those long opening verses we know with the other performers that here is a man to whom life in all its detail matters. This traveller sees the weathervane, hears the call of the linden tree, feels his weariness, gazes into the fading light of the three suns.

Moreover (and this is important even in this realm of high art), Peter Harvey sings with the voice of humanity. His tone admits a degree of vibrancy – he has known something of life. Christian Hilz's tone, by contrast is dry; his manner has something of the lawyer's factuality. It suits his partner's inflexible style and is in marked contrast to the small but persistent imaginative freedoms which Gary Cooper allows himself. Cooper's prize is that when he comes to the great test – the marvellous, unforgettable sound-image of the organ-grinder – he leaves us, uniquely (as it seems) in full and rightful possession.

Among the "insignificant" points of resemblance may be included the mundane facts that the names involved are not of the starry variety, and neither are the record labels among the long-established best-sellers. Adjustments may be required. **John Steane**

## Schumann

Der Rose Pilgerfahrt, Op 112

**Christoph Prégardien** ten Narrator **Anna Lucia Richter** sop Rose/Rosa **Michael Dahmen** bar Gravedigger **South German Chamber Choir / Gerhard Jenemann** with **Michael Gees** pf Carus © CARUS83 450 (63' • DDD • T/t)

**Schumann's rustic folk fairy-tale in a recording that is true to the composer**



"A very charming fairy-tale idyll" was Schumann's description of *The Pilgrimage of the Rose*, composed in 1851 for domestic performance by his

Düsseldorf "singing circle". His literary taste certainly grew more erratic in later years and lawyer-turned-poet Moritz Horn's coy tale of a rose who becomes human to experience the joys of love and motherhood is German Romanticism at its most sickly sweet. What evidently attracted Schumann was the poem's mix of Teutonic rusticity and moral idealism,

and the opportunity for picturesque choral scenes – gossamer fairies' choruses à la *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a funeral lament, a lusty hunt and a boozy wedding party complete with rustic bagpipe effects. If folksy naivety and cosy *Gemütlichkeit* rule, there are many *echt* Schumannesque touches of poetry: say, in the love duet between the Rose and Max the forester, or the tenor narrator's tender valediction (in flexible arioso-recitative, different in style from anything else in the work) before the Rose's final transfiguration.

While Schumann felt that the original version with piano was better suited to the "delicate subject matter", his cantata undeniably gains in colour and atmosphere from his subsequent orchestration, as heard on the recordings by Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos (EMI, 12/83<sup>R</sup>) and Gustav Kuhn (Chandos, 7/95). Still, if you want Schumann's folk fairy-tale presented as an intimate *Liederspiel* – a play-in-song – Gerhard Jenemann and his forces catch the work's spirit with charm and skill. As the narrator, Christoph Prégardien (whose son Julian makes his mark in the small part of Max) finely balances simplicity and a Lieder singer's subtlety of inflection. Anna Lucia Richter exudes virginal innocence as the Rose, and the other solos are decently taken by members of the tightly knit chorus. Michael Gees, playing on what sounds like an overtone-rich late-19th-century piano, is always alive to character and atmosphere. The recording of the voices is closer than I find ideal, to the detriment of really soft singing. The sole direct rival is a slightly more polished, operatically sophisticated performance directed by Marcus Creed (Harmonia Mundi, 7/99). Enjoyable as that is, this new recording is arguably truer to Schumann at his most bucolically ingenuous.

**Richard Wigmore**

## Tallis · Byrd

'Cantiones sacrae, 1575'

**Byrd** Emendemus in melius. Libera me Domine et pone. Peccantem me quotidie. Aspice, Domine quia facta est. Attollite portas. O lux beata Trinitas. Laudate pueri Dominum. Memento homo. Siderum rector. Libera me Domine de morte. Tribue Domine. Te deprecor. Gloria patri qui creavit. Miserere mihi Domini. Diliges Dominum. Domine secundum actum meum. Da mihi auxilium. **Tallis** Salvator mundi, Nos 1 and 2. Absterge Domine. In manus tuas. Mihi autem nimis. O nata lux. O sacrum convivium. Derelinquat impius. Dum transisset sabbatum. Honor virtus et potestas. Illae dum pergunt concite. Te lucis ante terminum. Miserere nostri Domine. Suscipe quaeso Domine. Si enim iniquitates. In ieiunio et fletu. Candidi facti sunt. Te lucis ante terminum

**Alamire / David Skinner**

Obsidian ② CD706 (56' • DDD)

**Thoroughly reliable and musical performances of a major motet volume**



This claims to be the first complete recording in the original order of the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae*, the volume of stunning historical and musical importance with which

Tallis and Byrd initiated the printing of sophisticated polyphony in Elizabethan England. Actually there was one in 1969 on L'Oiseau-Lyre, by Michael Howard and Cantores in Ecclesia, on LP and of mixed quality (partly reissued and all downloadable). But it is true to say that *Cantiones sacrae* has had less than its due attention as a collection, despite its including some of the loveliest and most popular motets from Elizabethan England: in modern editions the 17 works by Byrd are kept well separate from the 17 by Tallis. For David Skinner to call the printed order "the original order that Tallis and Byrd intended" is obviously to beg quite a few serious questions; but of course the massive advantage of the CD over the old LPs is that we can go straight to one motet: we know it will be here in its right place on the CD; and with this new set we can be sure that the performance will be thoroughly decent.

In the booklet David Skinner devotes some space to the problem of pitch-levels – a matter that is particularly troublesome in this collection of mostly new motets by Byrd and mostly earlier music by Tallis, all assembled in something of a hurry. But Skinner actually ducks the problem by having a team of 12 singers from whom he can choose those most appropriate to any particular piece. Even so, occasionally the result sounds at a pitch that makes texture a touch muddy.

They use solo voices throughout, mixed voices with a fairly open sound that brings with it more vibrato than we are used to hearing in such music nowadays. The requirements of the *intégrale* also mean that there is less of a tendency to linger over the many juicy dissonances in this music. That results in performances that are refreshingly free of self-indulgence. Some of the big Byrd pieces in particular are very good indeed. **David Fallows**

## 'A Lesson in Love'

**Beach** Ah, Love, but a day! Op 44, No 2 **Bolcom** Waitin' **Brahms** Am Sonntag Morgen, Op 49 No 1 **Bridge** Love went a-riding **Britten** O waly, waly **Canteloube** Songs of the Auvergne – Chut, chut **Copland** Pastorale. Heart we will forget him **Debussy** Apparition **Duparc** Extase **Fauré** Donc ce sera par un clair jour d'été **Hughes** I will walk with my love **Liszt** Es muss ein Wunderbares sein, S314 **Ravel** Chanson de la mariée **Schubert** Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118. Rastlose Liebe, D138. Die Männer sind méchant, D866 No 3. Du liebst mich nicht, D756 **Schumann** Jemand. Myrthen – Lied der Braut I; II **R Strauss** Hochzeitlich Lied, Op 37



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No 6 **Tosti** Pour un baiser **Traditional** Danny Boy **H Wolf** Zwischen Bergen, liebe Mutter. O wär dein Haus durchsichtig wie ein Glas. Erstes Liebeslied eines Mädchens, Op 19. Verschling' der Abgrund meines Liebsten Hütte **Kate Royal** *sop* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf* EMI © 948536-2 (65' • DDD)

### Kate Royal's beautifully sung new album is filled with affecting music



The bliss and drawbacks of falling in love have surely inspired more songs than any other human activity. Kate Royal's beautifully sung new album, with finely

characterised piano-playing from Malcolm Martineau, ranges imaginatively across a spectrum of composers who have captured the first pangs, the heartaches and the dashed hopes that can make life such a maelstrom of emotion. The programme is weighted in favour of expectation and fulfilment, climaxing in Duparc's sensuous "Extase", but the spectre of infidelity then looms in "Am Sonntag Morgen" from Brahms's Op 49, reflecting on the fickleness of men. "An ein Veilchen", another song from the same set that considers the faithlessness of women, is not included.

The disc is entitled "A Lesson in Love", a lesson that begins with William Bolcom's languid, cabaret-style "Waitin". In the waiting game, Royal catches the bright optimism of Schumann's "Jemand" and the folk-like girlish glee of Wolf's "Zwischen Bergen, liebe Mutter". As love blossoms, Wolf's "Erstes Liebeslied eines Mädchens" finds Royal in rapturous voice; in Schubert's "Rastlose Liebe" she embraces the anxieties and strivings of "bliss without peace" and in Copland's "Pastorale" a comforting contentment.

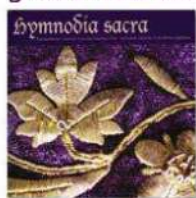
When things start to go wrong, she can encompass the sadness of Schubert's "Du lieb mich nicht", the rage of Wolf's "Verschling' der Abgrund" and the resignation of Copland's "Heart we will forget him", but this girl is not giving up: a reprise of Bolcom's "Waitin" suggests that the whole cyclical experience is worth going through again. **Geoffrey Norris**

### 'Hymnodia sacra'

Music from an 18th-century songbook **Carmina Chamber Choir** / **Árni Heimir Ingólfsson**

Smekkleysa © SMK74 (64' • DDD • T/T)

### Hymns from an Icelandic songbook, given in fresh and vital performances



As Árni Heimar Ingólfsson admits frankly in his booklet-note, "musical life in 18th-century Iceland did not amount to much compared to the great

capitals of music in Europe". *Hymnodia sacra* is a manuscript collection compiled in 1742 by a priest, probably to serve as a source book for the hymns he wished to teach his parishioners. It contains 100 songs and a further 150 texts with no music but with a rubric prescribing the tune to be used. The collection is divided by subject into five parts, of which the largest is "On Devout Conduct"; this recording draws on all five, together with material from other compilations including *Melódía*, a manuscript dating from about a century earlier.

All the texts but one are in Icelandic, the exception being "Beata nobis gaudia". This is one of several arrangements from Lutheran Germany: two are hymns by Matthias Greiter in versions by Hans Leo Hassler, and one comes from the collection of chorales for organ that Samuel Scheidt published in 1650. This last is sung by the sopranos with string trio accompaniment: Ingólfsson disarmingly writes that the performers "found it an enjoyable exercise to dress up the songs in a way that would have been familiar to foreign clergymen and musicians of the period".

The performances are fresh and vital, and well recorded. The most intriguing pieces are to be heard on tracks 18 and 19, where the tenors sing a kind of organum, all parallel fifths and octaves. An enterprising disc, well worth a listen. **Richard Lawrence**

### 'Missa brevis'

**Britten** *Missa brevis* **Caplet** *Messe à trois voix*

**Delibes** *Messe brève* **Fauré** *Messe basse*

**Leighton** *Missa Cornelia*, Op 81

**Maitrise de Toulouse; Conservatoire de Toulouse**

/ **Mark Opstad** with **William Whitehead** *org*

Regent © REGCD340 (71' • DDD)

### French choristers are fresh and unaffected in five short Masses



Created in 2006 by the English choral director Mark Opstad, the Maitrise de Toulouse offers a specialist musical education to young choristers aged 11-15.

The mixed-gender group of 21 singers recorded here is blessed with a fresh, clear, unaffected tone, blending effortlessly, especially in Caplet's unaccompanied three-voice Mass, with its soaring, arched phrases, which float beautifully in the spacious acoustic of Toulouse's neo-Gothic Temple du Salin.

Of the two other French composers represented here, Delibes's simple but charming *Messe brève* is certainly the equal to Fauré's better-known though more limpid and richly harmonised *Messe basse*. The latter suffers occasionally from some slightly flat intonation despite consistently excellent and solidly helpful support from organist William Whitehead. A special mention should also go

to soprano soloist Anaïs Rabary who sings with an affecting maturity and musical sensitivity beyond her years.

The two English works on the disc are Britten's oft-sung *Missa brevis*, composed in 1959 for George Malcolm and his Westminster Cathedral choirboys, and Kenneth Leighton's unaccountably previously unrecorded *Missa Cornelia* of 1980. These young French singers cope admirably with Leighton's English text, with only one or two slightly mangled vowels, and manage to bring out all the dramatic nuances of the Britten, particularly in the striking *Agnus Dei*.

As part of a recent resurgence of interest in youth choral singing across France, this timely disc serves as an important and worthwhile stepping-stone. **Malcolm Riley**

### 'Missa Cantantibus organis'

**Allegri** *De lamentatione Jeremiae prophetae*.

*Miserere mei, Deus. Incipit lamentatio Jeremiae prophetae. Gustate et videte* **Anerio** *Salve regina*

**Palestrina** *Cantantibus organis* **Stabile/Soriano/**

**Dragoni/Palestrina/Anonymous/Giovanelli/**

**Santini/Mancini** *Missa Cantantibus organis*

**The Cardinal's Musick / Andrew Carwood**

Hyperion © CDA67860 (68' • DDD • T/T)

### Rarities that don't deserve their obscurity, presented with passion



Following their *Gramophone* Recording of the Year Award for 2010, Andrew Carwood and Hyperion have risked all to record a curiosity that was published in 1930

but has been quietly gathering dust ever since. It is a cyclic Mass in 12 voices, probably from the 1580s, based on Palestrina's famous motet *Cantantibus organis* and composed by seven composers. Palestrina himself wrote part of the *Gloria* but the rest is by men who are so little known that they hardly even make it into *Grove*. That looks like commercial suicide. What this disc shows, though, is that they all deserve much better fate than being buried in a list of Palestrina's younger colleagues. It also shows that a burning commitment can lift music off the page and give it real life. The movements by Annibale Stabile and Ruggiero Giovanelli were perhaps the ones that struck my own ear most forcibly; but this is all really exciting stuff and should be heard by anybody who cares about music of the late-16th century.

But the rather later composer Allegri gets the main billing here, presumably because that's the only way to sell the CD. His *Miserere* – famous largely because of embellishments written down a century after he died – gets a lovely performance, if the three other motets added here slightly overstay their welcome. But the opening work is a treasure: Felice Anerio's eight-voice *Salve regina*.

**David Fallows**



# Opera

The stars come out for Vivaldi • Natalie Dessay as Cleopatra • Andreas Scholl's Purcell

## Charpentier

### Actéon

Aaron Sheehan *ten* ..... Actéon  
Teresa Wakim *sop* ..... Diane  
Mireille Lebel *mez* ..... Hyalé/Junon  
Lydia Brotherton *sop* ..... Daphné  
Amanda Forsythe *sop* ..... Aréthuse

### Orphée descendant aux enfers

Jason McStoots *ten* ..... Orphée  
Aaron Sheehan *ten* ..... Ixion  
Douglas Williams *bass-bar* ..... Tantale

### La pierre philosophale

Teresa Wakim *sop* ..... La Petite Gnomide  
Zachary Wilder *ten* ..... Un Silphe  
Lydia Brotherton *sop* ..... Le Feu  
Olivier Laquerre *bass-bar* ..... L'Eau  
Boston Early Music Festival Vocal and Chamber  
Ensembles / Paul O'Dette, Stephen Stubbs  
CPO © CPO777 613-2 (66' • DDD)

Actéon – selected comparison:

Les Arts Florissants, Christie (5/83\*) (HARM) HMA195 1095

### A must-have recording for admirers of Charpentier's operas



Nothing seems to be known of the circumstances surrounding the composition of *Actéon*, a pastoral opera lasting some 40 minutes.

Charpentier's patron, the devout Duchesse de Guise, seems unlikely to have been drawn to the tale of Actaeon turned into a stag and torn to death by his own hounds after inadvertently witnessing the goddess Diana bathing in the nude. It has been suggested, rather, that the piece was performed before the Dauphin as a cautionary tale: in his early twenties at the time of its composition, around 1684, the heir to Louis XIV was said to be more interested in hunting than in his wife.

It's a touching little piece, performed here with spirit and sensitivity. It must have been one of the first works by Charpentier to have been recorded by Les Arts Florissants and, as ever, it is rewarding to compare the two versions. The main difference lies in the choice of singer for the part of Actaeon. Aaron Sheehan is a light tenor with a rounded, unforced tone that falls very easily on the ear. Many readers will know what to expect from Les Arts Florissants's Dominico Visse: he is an *haute-contre*, his voice thinner and more individual. It is not to everyone's

taste but here it sounds right. He is surprisingly restrained at the moment of Actaeon's transformation, whereas Sheehan entertainingly imitates a stag when rhyming "voix", "vois" and "rois".

There's nothing to choose between the excellent women soloists on both recordings. Both versions add percussion, including bells in the delightfully Italianate duet for Daphne and Hyale, "Loin de ces lieux". When Actaeon is mocked by Diana's nymphs, the chorus on the new recording is almost violent, complemented by a tambourine; Christie's chorus is more delicate, with – amazingly – no tambourine. O'Dette and Stubbs take longer over the moving *Plainte* for strings only, to the advantage of the music.

For *Orphée descendant aux enfers*, there's a rival version from Il Seminario Musicale (Zig-Zag Territoires, 7/07); the exotically named Jason McStoots is more of an *haute-contre* (though billed as a tenor), as is Zig-Zag's Gérard Lesne. Any lover of Charpentier's music will want all three discs. **Richard Lawrence**

## Giordano

### Fedora

Angela Gheorghiu *sop* ..... Fedora Romazov  
Plácido Domingo *ten* ..... Boris Ipanov  
Nino Machaidze *sop* ..... Olga Sukarev  
Fabio Maria Capitanucci *bar* ..... De Sirix  
Marina Comparato *contr* ..... Dimitri  
Chorus and Orchestra of La Monnaie /  
Alberto Veronesi  
DG © 2 477 8367GH2 (96' • DDD • T/I)

Selected comparison:

Olivero, Gardelli (3/70\*) (DECCA) 475 7622DM2

### Domingo's voice is a wonder but is Gheorghiu's Fedora a match for Olivero's?



For myself there is only one *Fedora* (and of course I'm aware that from some quarters will come the instant objection "Why so many?"). In 1969 Decca

recorded the opera with the 59-year-old Magda Olivero in the name-part (in default of which there is a pirated version with Olivero under Rescigno from later that same year). For this new recording I did my best to forget Olivero but returned to her shortly afterwards to find new life had been breathed into the work in almost every phrase. Even so, the new recording from Brussels can move in

alongside the classic, for it too has a place in operatic history. Recorded in January 2008, it preserves the voice of the 67-year-old Plácido Domingo in a role which above all calls for voice, and a full-bodied, uncompromising Italian tenor at that. The miracle surpasses (dare one say it?) that of the fabled soprano, which has for half a century been celebrated as among the wonders of the lyric stage.

From early days it has seemed to me, "in the flesh" at least, that Domingo's "golden tone" has been an intermittent presence, at any moment likely to shine with its ideal purity and warmth through the layer of harder, less luscious substance. Over recent years (in *The Queen of Spades* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, for instance), I seem to have heard that golden centre with decreasing frequency. But here – from at least the middle of Act 2 onwards – the refulgence is heart-warming. One is constantly having cause to revise, or to regard the account as incomplete, any written estimate of Domingo's career as a singer, and here is yet another instance.

His performance is not matched by Angela Gheorghiu's in the title-role. She gives us a Fedora in extracts, a succession of lovely sounds in lovely(ish) arias, but by no means a cohesive character-creation and at no point suggesting the woman of passionate impulse so strongly depicted by Olivero. In the secondary roles, Fabio Maria Capitanucci is a likeable De Sirix (perhaps too mildly coloured in his "donna russa"), and Nino Machaidze's shallow tones suit the "social butterfly" her character is said to be, without being any more welcome on that account. The generous provision of small parts is made the most of, and recorded sound is clear and spacious. Alberto Veronesi's conducting lacks an effectively communicated feeling for the moment – as in the very opening of the opera, which can be so exhilarating in its suggestion that we have arrived, as it were, in mid-sentence. **John Steane**

## Vivaldi

### Ercole su'l Termodonte

Rolando Villazón *ten* ..... Ercole  
Joyce DiDonato *mez* ..... Ippolita  
Vivica Genaux *mez* ..... Antiope  
Philippe Jaroussky *countertenor* ..... Alceste  
Patrizia Ciofi *sop* ..... Orizia  
Diana Damrau *sop* ..... Martesia  
Romina Basso *mez* ..... Teseo  
Topi Lehtipuu *ten* ..... Telamone



St Cecilia Chamber Choir of Borgo San Lorenzo;  
Europa Galante / Fabio Biondi *vn/cad*  
Virgin ® © 694545-0 (143' • DDD • S/T/I)

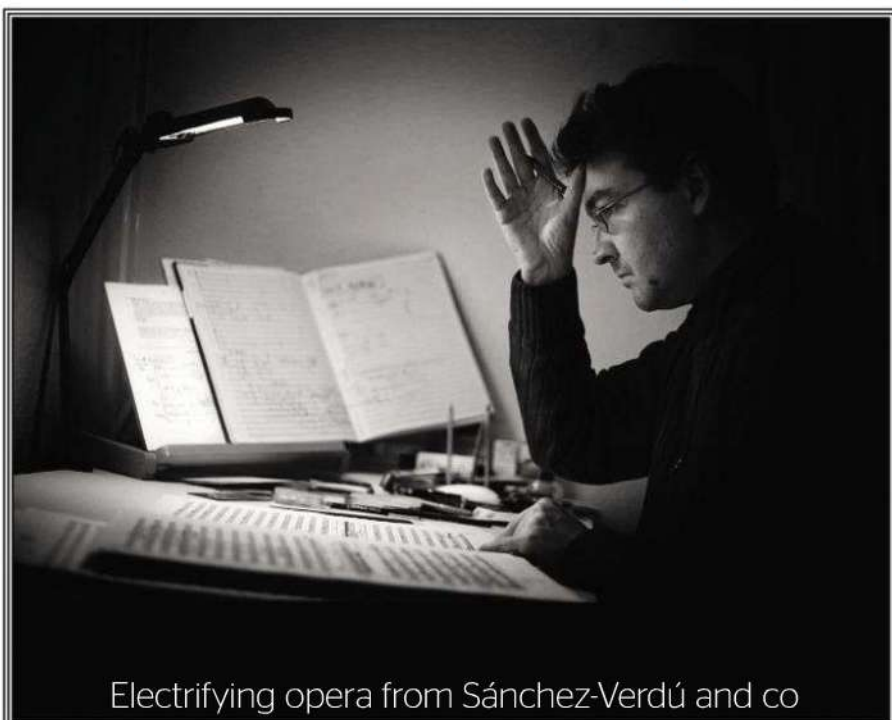
### A starry cast are employed for Vivaldi's Herculean tale



In 1722 Vivaldi's career hit a few snags in his native Venice, but very little of his music had yet been performed in Rome, so he regarded this as an opportunity to cultivate new business opportunities in the eternal city, where his new opera *Ercole su'l Termodonte* was first performed at the Teatro Capranica on January 23, 1723. The libretto was adapted from an old text by Antonio Salvi about the ninth labour of Hercules, commanded by Eurystheus to obtain the sword and girdle of the fierce Amazonian queen Antiope; naturally, the plot is embellished by misunderstandings and intrigues between several sets of lovers. The infectiously enthusiastic scholar Frédéric Delaméa contributes a customarily superb booklet-note but he has also had a benign influence upon Fabio Biondi's attempt to reconstruct the music, for which no single complete source survives. Biondi's claim that *Ercole* is now "restored to its original form" is an over-excited exaggeration: the only full text of *Ercole* is its printed libretto, although most of the arias survive in miscellaneous secondary sources scattered throughout libraries in Turin, Paris and Münster, and Vivaldi parodied quite a few numbers from eight different previous operas written for Venice, Mantua and Vicenza. Biondi provides an admirably clear list of his sources and methods, and has composed new recitatives throughout, hoping that this "will not be seen as presumptuous".

Virgin's contrived all-star cast has even the smallest roles performed by A-list singers with big reputations. Maybe the gathering together of such a "dream team" derives from greater concern for superstar selling-power than artistic integrity about characterisation, musical aptitude, etc. The inclusion of Joyce DiDonato, Philippe Jaroussky and Diana Damrau is an obvious instance of Vivaldi being used to serve Virgin's roster of star singers – not that the composer would have objected, nor found such an attitude strange in Italian Baroque opera houses. Indeed, it is exciting to hear a Baroque opera sung by an almost entirely high-class cast (only the threadbare Patrizia Ciofi is below par), although it seems odd that such lavish values have been accorded to an editorial reconstruction of an undeniably obscure and average work by a composer inconsistent in the genre.

Rolando Villazón is suitably larger than life as Hercules; he gets around tricky coloratura



Electrifying opera from Sánchez-Verdú and co

## Entrancing AURA

### Sánchez-Verdú

#### Aura

Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart (Sarah Sun *sop*  
Truike van der Poel *mez* Martin Nagy *ten*  
Guillermo Anzorena *bar* Andreas Fischer *bass*);  
Kammerensemble Neue Musik Berlin; Duo  
Alberdi & Aizpiorea (Iñaki Alberdi, Inigo  
Aizpiorea *accos*); SWR Experimental Studio /  
José M Sánchez-Verdú  
Kairos ® 0013052KAI (65' • DDD • T/I)



This is the second time in a few months that a recording from Kairos of a chamber opera by a young Iberian composer has left me entranced.

Not coincidentally, I suppose, José Sánchez-Verdú's *Aura* has several points of contact with Hector Parrá's *Hypermusik Prologue* (9/10): a libretto with a distinctly bizarre take on the perennial "boy meets girl" paradigm (here derived from the eponymous novel by Carlos Fuentes), a chamber ensemble heavily inflected by live electronics and a tendency for the minimally pared-down libretto to give way entirely to music at strategic points – only music, it seems, can do justice to the

profundity of the protagonists' experience. This is a reversal of the Monteverdian stance of *prima le parole* – words come first. So one assumes a knowing irony in the quotation of the opening of Monteverdi's *Sestina* from the Sixth Book of Madrigals (a moment in which I was also reminded of his *Lamento della ninfa*); it's an oddly moving passage, more subtly executed than when Sciarrino, say, does the same type of thing in his chamber operas.

In other respects the music is very much in keeping with a certain post-avant-garde stance, here reminiscent of late Nono – in the sense of nothing much happening, but very beautifully. The drones that dominate the score are a result of a group of gongs and tam-tams whose sympathetic vibrations reflect the work's title. The instrumentation proper (which includes solo strings, two accordions, a tuba, a double bass, a contrabass recorder and a bass flute) extends these drone sonorities in different ways; and when the filigree dynamics and sparse sonorities erupt into something wilder, the effect can be electrifying. All those who have participated in this project (not forgetting the sound engineers) have been involved in something rather special. Do listen. **Fabrice Fitch**



## Opera reviews

passages and embellishes with unbridled bravado but there are some hints of strain and his phrasing is sometimes clumsy. In contrast, Topi Lehtipuu enhances the Vivaldian credentials established recently by his outstanding recital disc (Naïve, 2/11). Romina Basso is in captivating voice as Teseo (the lyrical “Ti sento, sì ti sento”, borrowed from *Teuzzone*), and there is also impressive singing by Damrau (marvellous high passages in “Ei nel volto ha un non so che”) and Vivica Genaux (chilling venom in the suicidal rage aria “Scenderò, volerò, griderò”). However, Vivaldi’s dramatic situations, such as they are, don’t arouse much vivid interaction between most of the cast. For instance, DiDonato’s voice is ravishing in Ippolita’s “Onde chiare che susurrate” (the pastoral-tinged opener of Act 2, and one of the handful of numbers preserved intact without requiring Biondi’s editorial creativity), but her words are under-characterised. Likewise, Antiopé’s response, “Bel piacer ch’è la vendetta”, is supposed to be an ecstatic expression of unquenchable revenge but Genaux’s pretty performance lacks all trace of the gloating nastiness intended by the words. The underwhelming atmosphere is perhaps inevitable because the recording sessions at Florence’s Teatro alla Pergola took place in three batches far apart across a two-year period; one wonders if all of these famous singers were ever under one roof at the same time. However, spirited gusto is certainly the order of the day from Europa Galante: the opening Sinfonia typifies the crisp declamatory style of the strings, and a thrilling Sinfonia at the end of Act 1 depicts a battle between the Greek heroes and the Amazonians with splendid horns and thumping timpani; Alceste’s lovely slow aria “Quella beltà sol degna è d’amor” features Biondi’s beguiling viola d’amore obbligato (and is sung beautifully by Jaroussky), and aria accompaniments are always as lively or delicate as possible. **David Vickers**

### ‘Cleopatra’

**Handel** Giulio Cesare – Overture; Tutto può donna vezzosa; Dovè, Niren, dovè l’anima mia?<sup>ab</sup>; V’adoro, pupille; Esser qui deve in breve; Venere bella; Che sento? Oh dio!; Se pietà di me non senti; Per dar vita all’idol mio; Sinfonia bellica; E pur così in un giorno; Piangerò la sorte mia; Troppo crudeli siete; Voi che mie fide ancelle; Forzai l’ingresso a tua salvezza, o cara!<sup>1a</sup>; Da tempeste il legno infranto; Sinfonia; Bellissima Cleopatra<sup>2</sup>; Caro! Bella!<sup>1a</sup>

**Natalie Dessay** *sop*

<sup>a</sup>Sonia Prina *contr* <sup>b</sup>Stephen Wallace *countertenor*

**Le Concert d’Astrée / Emmanuelle Haïm**

Virgin © 907872-2 (66’ • DDD)

**Don’t let the concept put you off – this album is beautifully sung and played**

It has become preferable that singers pursue specific conceptual themes or parameters for



recitals her most famous arias have become clichéd, overdone and over-familiar. Moreover, such a decision to focus exclusively on only one role reduces the public perception of comparably compelling characters such as Cesare and Sesto into passengers of merely subsidiary value. Last November, in advance of their participation in a production of *Giulio Cesare* at the Palais Garnier, frequent collaborators Natalie Dessay and Emmanuelle Haïm recorded a programme that contains not only the usual suspects (“V’adoro, pupille”, “Se pietà”, “Piangerò”, “Da tempeste”) but also four of the Egyptian Queen’s other arias, two of which are premiere recordings of intriguing soliloquies that Handel composed fully in his autograph manuscript but then decided (rightly) to replace with entirely different and more famous material: he supplanted the animated heroic aria “Per dar vita all’idol mio” with the tragic lament “Se pietà” to convey Cleopatra’s desperate fear yet heroism as Cesare flees to fight the henchmen of her brother Tolomeo, and the mournful siciliano “Troppo crudeli siete” was scrapped in favour of the bittersweet “Piangerò” to illustrate the imprisoned Queen’s pessimism before the *lieto fine* is eventually established. If nothing else, this album enables us to hear both final thoughts and discarded drafts consecutively, and allows us the chance to decide whether or not Handel was correct to sacrifice two excellent climactic arias in favour of radically different ideas offering more potent dramatic sublimity.

The performances are consistently attractive. The Parnassus scene in which the disguised Cleopatra seduces Cesare (“V’adoro, pupille”) is unabridged and interpreted rapturously; Sonia Prina makes a cameo as Cesare in the duet “Caro! Bella!”. Le Concert d’Astrée’s accomplished playing extends to the Overture and two bellicose sinfonias, the latter of which provide zesty variety to proceedings. Dessay’s admirable endeavour to be emotive in “Se pietà” falls curiously flat; the dramatic atmosphere of the scene is better captured in “Piangerò” (with the flute pleasingly more audible than in some performances). With refreshing candour, Emmanuelle Haïm and Yves Castagnet are credited as the composers of Dessay’s florid embellishments, which whizz beyond the parameters of taste and style only infrequently: the end of the B section and the cadenza during “Piangerò” give rise to unwelcome vocal vertigo but some might

a Handel arias album, although devoting an entire disc solely to Cleopatra from *Giulio Cesare* does not instantly appear like a good idea: in lazily researched

love the predictably over-indulgent treatment of “Da tempeste”. Nevertheless, Dessay’s singing is never less than dazzling, and the stratospheric ornaments in the *da capo* of “Venere bella” are softly sensual. Despite instinctive reservations about its contrived strategy, this album holds together pretty well thanks to Dessay’s gorgeous voice, Haïm’s experienced direction of her capable orchestra and, of course, the modest matter of getting inside the mind of an inspired composer.

**David Vickers**

### ‘Jussi Björling Live’

Broadcast Concerts, 1937–60

**Jussi Björling** *ten* with various ensembles

West Hill Radio Archives © WHRA6036 (5h 4’ • ADD)

**A thorough traversal of Jussi Björling’s ‘hours’, cleaned up superbly**



Singers in the USA around the mid-20th century would still treasure their hour of glory at the Metropolitan and their exquisite hour at the Carnegie Hall but felt increasingly that their way to the nation’s heart might involve them in an altogether more comfortable 60 minute journey. It was in the Firestone Hour, the series of popular concerts which drew the ideal happy families of America round the radio to enjoy a lovely voice, a beautiful tune and a renewed conviction that’s it a wonderful world after all. The formula seldom varied. If there were two singers, the first would offer a lyrical operatic aria and the second another, after which they might join in duet. After a short break they would reappear with the big number, more passionate and dramatic, and then one or two songs, often from their native land, with perhaps a short spoken introduction. There was a live audience, invariably enthusiastic, and the programme began and ended with a verse of “If I could tell you” by Idabelle Firestone, who gave her prosperous name to the series.

Similar “hours” were sponsored by the Bell Telephone Company and Standard Oil of California. Yet, grateful to them as one would have to be, they hardly stimulated the musical imagination. And these add little in repertoire to what we know of Björling from studio and other recordings. Nor does the formulaic nature of the production encourage spontaneity. In his introductory essay, Roger Pines makes a good case for paying detailed attention but I can think of many more rewarding ways of spending five hours listening to music. For the Björling specialist there are moments when the loved voice appears afresh, the singer touched anew (for example) by bringing to the American public a Swedish song they are unlikely to have



heard before. And maybe the age-old personal thrill of a tenor voice (in Tosti's "L'alba separa" or the climax of "Ah, fuyez, douce image") will be experienced by someone in that audience as at no other time. But there is not much of which one would say, specifically, "Come here, everyone that thirsteth" – here, and not to other recitals, collections and complete recordings.

One distinction this issue has among competitors – it has easily the best recorded sound: securely pitched, inequalities adjusted, obscurities resolved. And that counts for much. After all, one says that many of these performances are unremarkable but that is within the context of Björling's recorded oeuvre. And many of these gleanings from one "hour" or another remain special, most of those that are truly special coming on the last CD, where we hear the young Jussi of 1937 and then some of the last recordings of all. Near the end of the whole pilgrimage is a performance of Lenski's aria from *Eugene Onegin*, where the young poet, doomed to an untimely death, sings of his longings. Björling recorded the aria many times but never, I think, so poignantly as here. As a prologue to this year's centenary celebrations the album is a worthy offering and this track an especially moving example of the great tenor's art at its best.

John Steane

## 'Ne me refuse pas'

**Berlioz** Roméo et Juliette, Op 17a – Premier transports<sup>a</sup>. Les Troyens – Je vais mourir

**Bizet** Carmen – L'amour est un oiseau rebelle<sup>a</sup>

**Cherubini** Médée – Ah! Nos peines seront communes **Halévy** Charles VI – Sous leur sceptre...Humble fille des champs

**Massenet** Hérodiade – Ne me refuse pas<sup>b</sup>.

Werther – Werther, Werther! Qui m'aurait dit la place **Saint-Saëns** Samson et Dalila – Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix **A Thomas** Mignon – Connais-tu le pays? **A Wormser** Clytemnestre – Qu'Apollon soit loué...Ombre d'Agamemnon **Marie-Nicole Lemieux** contr

<sup>b</sup>François Lis bass

<sup>a</sup>Le Jeune Choeur de Paris;

French National Orchestra / Fabien Gabel  
Naïve © V5201 (78' • DDD)

An imaginative programme and an unusual voice that should appeal to many



This is an attractive record and its appeal may well be felt before a note of it is heard. Many who take a particular interest in singing find themselves drawn towards the French repertoire partly on its own account and partly because they feel that much of it has been neglected and would still repay exploration. They will see in this programme an aria from Halévy's

*Charles VI*, which has as good a claim as any to the epithet "legendary", hardly a phrase of it being familiar to today's public and yet one particular phrase ("Guerre aux tyrants") coming so near to constituting a *casus belli* between France and England that the French thought it would be prudent to censor their own patriotism. Then there is the intriguing André Wormser, unknown to *Grove* and, for all I know, to Google itself. And this young singer – perhaps still new to some – so provocatively classified as "contralto" also has the kind of name and background that attract the attention of traditional record collectors.

Well, I would suggest that listeners who feel themselves so attracted should start not with the opening number, Hérodiade's big solo which gives the programme its title, but with the gentler Mignon and Charlotte. The vociferous declamation in which we hear her first encourages the naturally vibrant voice to quiver alarmingly. This is not a "spread" vibrato but it needs care: as the French say to children before crossing the road: "Attention!"

John Steane

## 'O Solitude'

**Purcell** If music be the food of love, Z379a.

Come, ye sons of art, away, Z323 – No 3, Sound the trumpet; No 5, Strike the viol. King Arthur, Z628 – Chacony; Fairest Isle; What power art thou. Chacony in G minor, Z730. The Fairy Queen, Z629 – One charming night. Pausanias, the Betrayer of his Country, Z585 – No 1, Sweeter than roses. Dido and Aeneas, Z626 – When I am laid in earth. The Gordian Knot Unty'd, Z597 – incidental music. Welcome to all the pleasures, Z339 – No 3, Here the deities approve. Oedipus, King of Thebes, Z583 – No 2, Music for a while. O dive custos, Z504<sup>a</sup>. O solitude, my sweetest choice, Z406. Pavan in G minor, Z752. Now that the sun hath veiled his light (An Evening Hymn on a Ground), Z193

**Andreas Scholl** countertenor

<sup>a</sup>Christophe Dumaux countertenor

Accademia Bizantina / Stefano Montanari

Decca © 478 2262DH (77' • DDD • T/D)

Glimpses of Andreas Scholl's quality can be heard but much is lost in transposition



Andreas Scholl's voice is darker, less ethereal and not so beguiling as when it exploded onto the scene in the mid-1990s but this motley collection confirms that his way with words has strengthened. The finest Purcellian countertenors from Alfred Deller to Daniel Taylor have shown plenty of wonderful repertoire tailor-made for their voice-type and, indeed, Scholl includes most of the usual suspects. However, some of the ill-advised means by which the programme is expanded to fill a long disc are inartistic. Recourse to convenient transposition is not in

itself an unforgivable evil but here it is resorted to frequently and predictably: the downward adaptation of "Fairest Isle" and "An Evening Hymn" work pleasantly enough but an impersonation of Dido for an overdone rendition of her famous lament feels pointless (does the world really need to hear Scholl singing "When I am laid in earth"?), and the upwardly warbling in the bass Cold Genius's frosty song from *King Arthur* is camped-up and silly, notwithstanding the undeniable iciness of Accademia Bizantina's strings.

Stefano Montanari's crisp direction seldom suggests an affinity to Purcell and the instrumental aspects of the recital are frequently insensitive and unidiomatic. Pleasing moments include two tenderly played G minor interludes (Chacony, Pavan), but the continuo accompaniment to "If music be the food of love" is horribly inelegant; the whimsical inclusion of harp does not reflect any genuinely historical notion about basso continuo as Purcell knew it in late-17th-century England (if I'm mistaken, readers are welcome to provide chapter and verse otherwise). Scholl sings "Music for a while" beautifully but our cares are considerably less than beguiled because of a ruinous battery of continuo instruments (the best performances tend to realise that only harpsichord and perhaps cello is sufficient, or maybe just a lute, but here we get all of them vying for attention obtrusively along with the over-employed harpist). "O solitude" starts promisingly with just an organ but after a few bars several other continuo players cannot resist obliterating the solitary atmosphere. Christophe Dumaux's discomfort with singing English in the duet "Sound the trumpet" doesn't help matters, although the two countertenors combine marvellously in *O dive custos* (an elegy on the death of Queen Mary but actually composed for two sopranos).

Another annoyance is the superficial booklet-note, which informs us that Dumaux "is a very cool guy" (so what?), and concludes with Scholl's remark that "It's not music for musicologists, it's music for human beings"; as I've yet to meet a musicologist that is alien, bestial or resides with the undead, I'm not sure Decca should be promoting some sort of mindless discrimination between scholars and "ordinary folk like us" (once upon a time Decca's Baroque artists were renowned for working in enthusiastic collaboration with leading academics but those halcyon days seem gone). This vexing product is only a pale ghost of an interesting statement but from time to time there are glimpses that Scholl is a decent Purcell singer, and his ardent fans will lap it up without reticence.

David Vickers



# DVD & Blu-ray

Gorgeous Gounod from Paris • A convincing Così • A Meistersinger for our times

## Adamo

### Little Women

Stephanie Novacek *mez*..... Jo  
 Joyce DiDonato *mez*..... Meg  
 Chad Shelton *ten*..... Laurie  
 Stacey Tappan *sop*..... Beth  
 Margaret Lloyd *sop*..... Amy  
 Daniel Belcher *bar*..... John Brooke  
 Chen-Ye Yuan *bar*..... Friedrich Bhaer  
 Katherine Ciesinski *mez*..... Cecilia March  
 James Maddalena *bar*..... Gideon March  
 Gwendolyn Jones *mez*..... Alma March  
 Derrick Parker *bar*..... Mr Dashwood  
 Houston Grand Opera Orchestra /  
 Patrick Summers

Stage director Peter Webster

Video director Brian Large

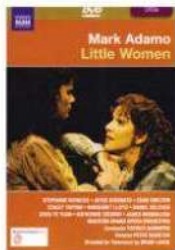
Naxos ② DVD 2 110613 (115' • NTSC • 16:9 •

PCM 2.0 and DTS 5.1 • 0 • N/S/s)

Recorded at the Wortham Theatre Centre,

Houston, Texas, March 17-18, 2000

**Mark Adamo's setting of Louisa May  
 Alcott's novel boasts an impressive cast**



I reviewed this March 2000 taping when it was released on public television in 2001 and found *Little Women* to be "neither a Currier & Ives lithograph nor a searing psychological portrait".

Mark Adamo's opera about

an American woman coming of age during the dawning of feminist struggles, I said, was more likely to tug on the heart-strings than to arouse the body politic. The story is told in flashbacks from the March family attic, which enables Adamo to create multiple perspectives on central moments in the story such as Beth's death, where Jo and her memories seem to have the physical insubstantiality of ghosts.

Adamo's deeply personal brand of music theatre envelops Alcott's beloved sisters, family and friends in a simple but intense stream of appealing tunes and uncomplicated harmonies ranging from 20th century psychological anguish to Broadway melodies. The composer's libretto captures much of the grace and fluency of Alcott's writing, and generously keeps the large cast busy with a series of arias and ensemble pieces. Director Brian Large captures the bittersweet melodrama of the action without distracting from the flow of the music. What was an outstanding cast in 2000 is still

astounding today, led by Stephanie Novacek, who patiently creates for Jo a spectrum of intimate depth and then explores it with a sure dramatic touch and a voice of power and beauty. She is equalled in emotional range and outdone in virtuosity by Joyce DiDonato's explosive, radiant Meg. Silver-voiced Chad Shelton as Laurie is intoxicated in a refreshingly earnest kind of way, and golden-voiced Chen-Ye Yuan as Friedrich Bhaer is brilliant.

The DVD has demonstration-quality sound both on the stage and in the pit, where the orchestra play with precision and style. As a calling-card for Mark Adamo, who is currently working on a commission from San Francisco Opera for the 2013 season, this release is also a convincing demonstration that *Little Women* could be an audience-pleaser wherever it plays.

Laurence Vittes

## WF Bach

Wohl dem, der den Herren fürchtet,  
 BR-WFB F19<sup>3</sup>. O Wunder, wer kann dieses  
 fassen, BR-WFB F2<sup>3</sup>. Ach, dass du den Himmel  
 zerrisest, BR-WFB F3<sup>3</sup>. Got fähret auf mit  
 Jauchzen, BR-WFB F10<sup>3</sup>. Sinfonia in D minor,  
 BR C7

<sup>3</sup>Mainz Bach Choir;

L'Arpa Festante / Ralf Otto

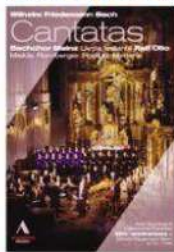
Accentus ② DVD ACC20103 (85' • NTSC • 16:9 •

PCM stereo & DTS 5.1 • 0 • T/I)

Recorded live at the Augustinerkirche, Mainz,

June 1, 2010

**An opulent setting for newly discovered  
 works by the quirkiest of Bach's sons**



In 1999 lost works by members of the Bach family were rediscovered in Kiev. Among them were cantatas by Wilhelm Friedemann, whose tercentenary last year was the occasion for a sumptuous concert at

which they were revived. The live recording was made in the beautiful Augustinerkirche in Mainz, whose proportions impose a welcome, restraining harmony on the ornate rococo decoration. I mention the building first because its visual impact is integral to this project's success, matching the splendour of the music.

For it is truly splendid music, and this recording a worthy successor to the cantatas recorded 20 years ago by Hermann Max and

the Rheinische Kantorei (Capriccio, 11/94).

The usual cliché that these works reveal a new side to the composer is here amply justified, for whereas some of the choral numbers on the Capriccio discs seemed a tad undernourished, even perfunctory, the opening choruses here are elaborate and richly wrought, full of the incident that make Friedemann such an endearing figure (albeit an often misunderstood one). The text of the Christmas cantata *Ach, dass du den Himmel zerrisest* ("Ah, that you might rend the heavens asunder!") inspires him to particular boldness, as the choir sing a single line (not, incidentally, a chorale melody) entirely in octaves, and are suddenly interrupted, aptly illustrating the opening words, by the soloists. There's some stunning instrumental writing, too, for the bass aria of the same cantata, in which the horns display quite astonishing athleticism. Many of the arias feature a pair of the same kind of obbligato instrument, at various times horns, violins and flutes, and as the band also includes trumpets, oboes, a bassoon and a continuo group boasting a lute, there is variety in abundance.

The Mainz Bach Choir is in every sense a full participant and the instrumentalists of L'Arpa Festante acquit themselves with distinction. The soloists are evenly matched, though the alto is perhaps slightly less assured in her delivery. The collective sense of commitment, even of enjoyment, is palpable, however. On balance, this may just be the best way to get to know a fascinating composer.

Fabrice Fitch

## Mozart

### Così fan tutte

Miah Persson *sop*..... Fiordiligi  
 Isabel Leonard *mez*..... Dorabella  
 Patricia Petibon *sop*..... Despina  
 Topi Lehtipuu *ten*..... Ferrando  
 Florian Boesch *bar*..... Guglielmo  
 Bo Skovhus *bass*..... Don Alfonso

Vienna State Opera Chorus;

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra /

Adám Fischer

Stage director Claus Guth

Video director Brian Large

EuroArts ② DVD 207 2538; ② 207 2534

(3h 11' • NTSC • 1080i • 16:9 • PCM stereo and

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 • 0 • N/s)

Recorded live at the Salzburg Festival, July and

August 2009





The Opéra makes a new start with its first Mireille

## Ahead of THE FIELD

### Gounod

#### Mireille

Inva Mula *sop*..... Mireille  
Charles Castronovo *ten*..... Vincent  
Franck Ferrari *bar*..... Ourrias  
Alain Vernhes *bass*..... Maître Ramon  
Sylvie Brunet *contr*..... Taven  
Anne-Catherine Gillet *sop*..... Vincenette  
Sebastien Droy *contr*..... Andreoun  
Nicolas Cavallier *bass*..... Maître Ambroise  
Amel-Brahim Djelloul *sop*..... Clémence  
Ugo Rabec *bar*..... La Passeur

Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra National,  
Paris / Marc Minkowski

Stage director Nicolas Joel

FRA Productions (P) (C) DVD FRA002

(179' • NTSC • 16:9 • Stereo and DTS 5.1 • 0 • N/S/s)

Recorded live, September 2009

Extra features include a conversation between Nicolas Joel, Marc Minkowski and Christophe Ghristi. This production, filmed at the Palais Garnier in September 2009, marked a return to traditional values. The new director of the Opéra National de Paris, Nicolas Joel, wanted a clean break from the controversial reign of



his predecessor and chose to open his first season with Gounod's *Mireille*, getting its first ever performances at the Opéra and in a production of his own that put the emphasis on traditional realism.

The live DVD recording is very well filmed – an obvious first choice for a collector, even if there were many alternatives, which there aren't. The pastoral landscape of Provence, so important to Gounod as he composed this opera, is beautifully evoked. For Act 1 Joel and his designer, the veteran Ezio Frigerio, show us a period picture of country girls in straw hats and pinafores gambolling through the fields just before the harvest. The scene is so realistic that one half-wonders if a real cornfield was dug up and planted on the Palais Garnier stage. Later settings are sparer in style – the cornfield persists for Act 2 instead of a change of scene to the amphitheatre at Arles and the

Crau desert is simply a huge burning sun on the backdrop – but everything feels true to the opera's pastoral spirit.

The musical performance is equally fine. Inva Mula, a nicely lyrical Mireille, rises to the challenge of a role as taxing as Marguerite in *Faust* with only occasional signs of strain, notably in the brilliant showpiece ending to her Act 2 aria which Gounod was elbowed into adding before the premiere. Charles Castronovo looks ideal as her rustic lover, Vincent, and sings with a winning blend of poetry and ardour. Their respective fathers, played by Alain Vernhes and Nicolas Cavallier, become rather stiff stereotypes but Franck Ferrari makes a credibly jealous rival out of Ourrias. Marc Minkowski conducts the five-act version of the opera with his customary light touch and no embarrassment about indulging Gounod when he is at his most sentimental. It seems unlikely we will find the "simplicity and delicacy" of *Mireille* – Joel's words – more faithfully represented than this.

Richard Fairman



## DVD & Blu-ray reviews

**Claus Guth's vision of Mozart's opera is dramatically gripping and convincing**



German theatre director Claus Guth is on quite a roll with his three modern-dress Salzburg Mozart/da Ponte productions and his 1850s Villa Wesendonk-set Zürich *Tristan* (hopefully to be released soon).

Superficially, this *Così* is updated to some contemporary party set in the girls' two-storey apartment. On the wall are wooden tribal masks – trendy decorations, but rapidly adopted by Alfonso and the boys for use as “Albanian” disguise. Alfonso himself and Despina (especially) move in a stylised, non-naturalistic manner when the four lovers are not watching them: they become, almost, 18th-century gods controlling the acting and relating of the couples. So, a 21st-century look but a clear reference back to Ariosto and Marivaux, sources which da Ponte used for a libretto that was his only original work for Mozart.

Guth is deft at choreographing the pain and the embarrassment of “wrong” couples getting together. The recitative following the Act 2 serenade in the garden lasts a long time as the attempts to talk and flirt produce only awkward pauses and staggering banalities about the weather – funny and cringe-making at the same time. The scene between the boys after Guglielmo has (as clearly pointed here by a bedroom exit) made love to Dorabella is paced as an unbearable wait for the truth to emerge.

The latter part of Act 2 seems unfinished in comparison with what precedes it. Some naturalistic questions, which Guth has not so much avoided before but shown to be irrelevant, are now rather muddled. It's unclear why Petibon's Despina, a cross hitherto between a hip young working charlady and a plotting goddess, has the angry lines Mozart and da Ponte provide for her when the Alfonso plot is fully revealed. It's very unclear what is the sisters' attitude to their “real” lovers' return: Brian Large's cameras track only Miah Persson's Fiordiligi here. She seems to show contempt and indifference but the home viewer doesn't get the whole picture.

Despite these reservations – and Salzburg has recently announced re-studied versions of all three productions for summer 2011 – this is already a mighty contribution to the otherwise rather naturalistic *Così* filmography. Its musical performances are solid (the local press described Fischer and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra as “conventional and at *mezzo-forte* throughout”); its acting ones much more than that.

**Mike Ashman**

## Wagner

### Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

Franz Hawlata *bass-bar*.....Hans Sachs  
Klaus Florian Vogt *ten*.....Walther  
Michaela Kaune *sop*.....Eva  
Artur Korn *bass*.....Pogner  
Michael Volle *bass*.....Beckmesser  
Norbert Ernst *ten*.....David  
Carola Guber *sop*.....Magdalene  
Markus Eiche *bass*.....Kothner  
Charles Reid *ten*.....Vogelgesang  
Rainer Zaun *bass*.....Nachtigall  
Edward Randall *ten*.....Zorn  
Hans-Jürgen Lazar *ten*.....Eisslinger  
Stefan Heibach *ten*.....Moser  
Martin Snell *bass*.....Ortel  
Andreas Macco *bass*.....Schwarz  
Diogenes Randes *bass*.....Foltz  
Friedemann Röhligh *bass*.....Nightwatchman  
Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra /  
Sebastian Weigle

Stage director Katharina Wagner

Video director Andreas Morell

Opus Arte ② ③ DVD OA1041D; OABD7078D

(5h 6' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • LPCM stereo, DTS 5.1 and

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 • 0 • N/S/s)

Recorded live 2008

Includes Cast Gallery and 'Making of' Documentary

**Katharina Wagner seeks to address issues that have dogged Bayreuth for decades**



Katharina Wagner at first presents Walther von Stolzing as a paint-spraying performance artist and Beckmesser as a retentive, Reclam photocopying pedant (Reclam in Germany publishes a small uniform

yellow edition of every great work of the nation's literature, and many foreign ones too). Hans Sachs's tie is messily undone at the Masters' assembly and he chain-smokes throughout. He finds Beckmesser boring and amusing by turns but is riveted by Walther's improvised creation on the Masters' high table.

This nicely observed updating would be enough to sustain some productions for a whole evening. But, for Katharina Wagner, this is just the tip of the iceberg. In Act 3 she presents a volte-face of traditional alliances, interspersing that with representations of what she calls the piece's “very unfortunate history”. The consequence of the nocturnal plots and riot in (a not yet flawlessly staged) Act 2 is that Sachs and Walther sell out and join the reactionaries.

Before we get to the Festwiese (with its Wieland Wagner-ish bleachers), the “blessed” Quintet is played as a parody of sentimental National Socialist family pictures, replete with Walther's and Eva's children-to-come. Then, in the entry music of the guilds and girls from Fürth, Sachs takes part in a dark

night of the soul in which German masters of art in carnival-sized masks (including Wagner and Goethe) are overtaken by scenes of book-burning and anti-Semitic authoritarianism.

A new hero then appears in competition – Beckmesser. He performs not a self-parodying stumble through Sachs's song but a staged happening more colourful and obscene than anything Walther has shown earlier (it could be read as a Nazi nightmare of “decadent” art, performed by the character often considered to be one of Wagner's Jewish portraits). Walther then performs the establishment's winning prize song entry in slushiest *X Factor* style and collects a huge cheque.

Wow! Did Wagner write all, or any, of that? Not literally, of course, but many people throughout the last century have thought (or even hoped) that he did. And, as the director comments, “in Bayreuth, above all, we finally need to address this issue”.

Some may consider Michael Volle's Beckmesser a little too *bel canto* – he employs none of the comic vocal mannerisms that, say, Derek Hammond-Stroud uses on the Chandos Goodall set (10/08) – but his range of vocal colours and accents easily encompasses the range from suspicious pedant to wackily inspired improviser that he portrays. Sachs is a big sing for the ever-versatile Hawlata but he manages the tricky task of being faithful to both his Wagner family masters and no one may feel cheated by his serious delivery of either Flieder or Wahn monologues. Vogt (and Weigle's accompanying) make his lighter Heldentenor as suitable for his role as his height and appearance are for this staging. This is a more consistent cast than that of Bayreuth's recent *Ring*; the remaining musical performances, maestro Weigle's relatively light and swift traversal of the score included, demonstrate complete identification with the production. But as all stage productions should be, this is 200 per cent a *Meistersinger* to see. In the best tradition of Wieland Wagner the great re-stager, the 2008 performance of the production preserved here – the first “live” and Blu-ray filming from actual Festival performances – is already a little obsolete, modified annually by telling changes to soloists' costumes and Beckmesser's act in the song contest. **Mike Ashman**

## Wagner

### Rienzi

Torsten Kerl *ten*.....Rienzi  
Camilla Nylund *sop*.....Irene  
Ante Jerkunica *bass*.....Steffano Colonna  
Kate Aldrich *mez*.....Adriano  
Krzysztof Szumanski *bass*.....Paolo Orsini  
Lenus Carlson *baritone*.....Cardinal Orvieto  
Clemens Bieber *ten*.....Baroncelli  
Stephen Bronk *bass*.....Cecco del Vecchio  
Chorus and Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper,  
Berlin / Sebastian Lang-Lessing



Stage director **Philipp Stölzl**

Video director **Johannes Grebert**

Arthaus Musik ② ③ DVD 101 521; Blu-ray 101 522

(156' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • PCM stereo, DTS 5.1 and

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 • 0 • N/S/s)

Recorded live 2010

Special features include 'Making of' documentary

**Chaplin plays Hitler plays *Rienzi* in this cut-down version of the opera**



This performance calls itself a "version in two parts by Philipp Stölzl (the stage director here) and Christian Baier". It plays for 156 minutes as opposed to the

217 minutes of EMI's

1976 recording of the first

printed score of 1844 (2/92<sup>8</sup>) or the 280 minutes of a fuller reconstruction for the June 1976 BBC broadcast conducted by Edward Downes (a pirate appeared on Ponto).

That's an awful lot of opera to be lost. In *Wagner's Rienzi: A Reappraisal* (OUP: 1976) John Deathridge explains the error of Cosima Wagner and Julius Knieke's attempt to carve a shorter music drama from the score: "they cut out or seriously distorted some of the best music in the work which, because of Wagner's difficulty in reconciling his musical instincts with the apparatus of 'grand opera', stands outside the main course of its dramatic development." His comments may be equally applied to the present reduction.

This new Berlin production follows a trope now familiar from modern stagings of the work – *Rienzi* is Adolf Hitler. The young film and video director Stölzl and his four-woman creative team throw the kitchen sink at this idea: no relevant filmic reference, from Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* via Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* to Oliver Hirschbiegel's recent *Downfall*, is left unquoted in design or acting. Torsten Kerl's considerable vocal and visual impersonation of the title-role has absorbed, and reproduces, Chaplin's Hitler to an almost frightening degree and even Kate Aldrich's no less imposing Adriano, in Nazi bell-hop uniform and quiffed hair, has acquired some expressionist Chaplinesque naivety.

These references are supplemented by video-screened footage of the Nazi military and the mountain view from Berchtesgaden. The crowd scenes are dressed and played as Brechtian "epic" theatre – distorting face masks, non-naturalistic acting, deliberately clumped-up crowds. The Berlin chorus deserves applause for its plucky singing in the busy conditions of this production but its acting and movement are, without wishing to sound chauvinist, not yet the equal of our director- and choreographer-hardened British opera choruses. The orchestra rides through a rough Overture to accompany with gusto, if

not subtlety. The TV filming tries with some success to mix up the (intentionally) flat-on look of the staging for a small screen.

Someone now needs to be brave enough to stage Wagner's full musical intentions for this innovative apprentice score. For the moment this new release, the only official filming of the opera to date, provides a committed and well-sung preview of *Rienzi*'s attractions in a lively production. **Mike Ashman**

## 'Competitors'

'Russia's Child Prodigies'

Documentary featuring Irina Chistyakova, Nikita Mndoyants, Dmitry Krutogolov, Elena Kolesnichenko *pps*

EuroArts ② ③ DVD 205 7418 (98' • NTSC • 16:9 •

PCM stereo and DTS 5.1 • 0 • s)

**A sobering look at the unfortunate fate of many promising young musicians**



This dreary if perversely instructive DVD charts the ups and downs (mainly downs) of four young Russian pianists as they journey from their early prodigy years to a bleak and uncertain future; an all-too-rapid

move from innocence to experience. Film of early acclaim and an assumption that fame and fortune are a natural heritage leads to a quagmire of contradictory advice from "professors" and competition jurors. To be told that your performance was too slow only to be told that the same performance was too fast is hardly enlightening, while attempts to explore an infinitely rich repertoire are all too often treated with scorn and indifference. Whether in Russia, Germany or France much of the teaching on display looks shoddy and irresponsible.

Yet at the heart of this DVD is "god's curse on pianists" and a competition scene that has proliferated throughout the globe. Here agents in particular unite to declare that without a first prize in a major competition you have no chance of a career; a characteristically lazy and absurd assumption. Many of today's most celebrated and potentially celebrated pianists have achieved their status without such artifice. Today the majority of competition winners are quickly forgotten, their brief celebrity eclipsed by their successors. More encouragingly, some of today's most gifted young pianists have achieved recognition and recording contracts without such adventitious aid. Meanwhile, the luckless four on this DVD are left in a sad limbo, their years of study leading only to a stark and uncertain future and leaving one participant to bewail "nobody wants me!" For her, as for her companions, music has become the reverse of life-enhancing, a neurotic rather than an enriching obsession. **Bryce Morrison**



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## REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

# Parisian and Viennese Eloquence

More treasures from the Decca back catalogue make a welcome return

**T**wo eminent theatre conductors take centre stage for the latest batch of Australian Eloquence reissues: Albert Wolff, who holds the record for giving the most performances of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and **Anatole Fistoulari**, husband of Mahler's daughter Anna, conductor at the Ballets Russes and, years later, principal conductor of the London Philharmonic. Fistoulari's early stereo LPO recordings of Ippolitov-Ivanov's *Caucasian Sketches* and Glière's ballet suite *The Red Poppy* (both previously out on a 1958 RCA LP) are characteristic examples of his red-blooded approach to Russian music, the Glière suite ending with a supercharged account of a "dance" that we know as "The Russian Sailor's Dance". The Glière sounds rather more vivid than the Ippolitov-Ivanov but both more than pass muster.

The other Eloquence Fistoulari release, a double-pack called "The World of the Ballet", sees another much-loved RCA LP return on silver disc, namely a coupling of Lecocq's sparkling *Mam'zelle Angot* (arranged by Gordon Jacob) and the suites from Walton's *Façade*, both with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and both sounding as fresh now as they did when the original sessions were taped. A tasty menu of Verdi, Mussorgsky, Rossini and Saint-Saëns "opera ballets" (all with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra) will surely boost energy levels, the *Samson et Dalila* Bacchanale especially – just try the close! – and there are older but hardly less sparkling accounts of Antal Dorati's jaunty Johann Strauss ballet *Graduation Ball*, the *Don Quixote* Pas de deux by Minkus and Weber's *Invitation to the Dance* in Berlioz's orchestration, all with the New Symphony Orchestra.

The Weber/Berlioz also turns up on one of three Eloquence double-packs devoted to the art of **Albert Wolff**, "Invitation to the Dance", which opens with a famous recording of Glazunov's *The Seasons* ballet, a little stolid at times, perhaps, but full of lovely things, though I'm not convinced that Wolff quite measures up to Désormière, Ansermet or Irving in this adorable score. Wolff's performances of Ravel's *Boléro* and *Alborada del gracioso* are in a quite different class – sultry, powerfully evocative and acutely attentive to detail – and he weaves parallel quotas of magic (and occasional drama) for Büsser's version of Adam's *Giselle* and the three familiar dances from Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat*.

Some of the Wolff material has already appeared on Testament, for example Massenet's *Scènes pittoresques* and *Scènes alsaciennes*, both of which arrive via Decca Eloquence's new collection "Fête à la française". The same package includes more Massenet (the wonderful *Phèdre* Overture, and *Prélude* and "La nuit de Noël" from *Werther*), the somewhat over-expansive *Impressions d'Italie* by Gustave Charpentier, Lalo's *Rapsodie norvégienne*, A minor Scherzo and *Le roi d'Ys* Overture, and two masterworks by César Franck, *Le chasseur maudit* and *Rédemption*. The invariable keyword for Wolff is "balance" (a concept that's much aided by fine vintage Decca engineering), with canny pacing as an essential runner-up priority. "Overtures in Hi-Fi" features an exceptional sequence of Berlioz overtures, some of them admittedly more "hi-fi" than others, but *Les francs-juges* in particular is a truly classic performance, building in excitement as it progresses, with a joist-shaking bass drum to help bolster the effect. The remaining overtures are by Hérold, Reznicek, Suppé (a quite marvellous *Pique Dame*), Nicolai, Saint-Saëns, Adam and, most

delightfully, five overtures by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber. Wolff's performances are consistently idiomatic, whether in poetic or dancing mode, and he draws the very best from his highly capable French forces, the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra perhaps having the edge over the Orchestra of the Opéra-Comique. Sound-wise, both the mono and stereo tapes have been very effectively refurbished.

Wolff's consistent musicality has its chamber music parallel in the work of the **Vienna Octet** (Wiener Oktett), which is also being handsomely celebrated on Decca Eloquence, sometimes in alternative recordings of the same score. Mozart's Divertimenti K287, 334 and 247 appear both on the collection "Mozart from a Golden Age" (recordings from the early and mid-Fifties) and, in early Sixties remakes, on a programme of "Five Divertimenti". Choosing between them is no easy (or straightforward) task, though the earlier set has that extra degree of sparkle, whereas the later one adds an element of warmth and, in terms of sound, spatial definition. "Same difference", you could say, with two versions of the Clarinet Quintet, both featuring clarinetist Alfred Boskovsky, the earlier version (with works by Brahms and Böhm) a brighter blend if more thinly recorded than the 1964 remake which comes coupled with the *Kegelstatt* Trio, the Mozart and Beethoven Quintets for piano and winds, and Michael Haydn's Divertimento in G. Other Octet collections feature Schubert, Spohr, Romantic chamber music, 20th-century music and, especially interesting, Dvořák – his two late string quintets, the Sextet, Op 48, and the Bagatelles, Op 47. And there's a Dvořák bonus, the Janáček Quartet dancing their way through the *American* Quartet, more buoyant than the Oktett performances and which shows up the one minor quibble I have about the Viennese group's playing, namely a very occasional sense of "sameness". But it is only occasional and in most other respects these are exceptionally satisfying performances, again beautifully transferred.

## THE RECORDINGS



**Glière. Ippolitov-Ivanov** Orch Wks **Fistoulari**  
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## REPLAY

# The Furtwängler sound

Wartime recordings that stir the soul

**P**an back a further decade or so to wartime Germany and the Berlin radio engineers were busy capturing some highly intense performances by the Berlin Philharmonic under their much-loved chief conductor, **Wilhelm Furtwängler**. Regular *Gramophone* readers hardly need reminding that these by now famous recordings have been reissued countless times, both “officially” and “unofficially”, and with widely differing results, but these latest refurbishments by Pristine Audio warrant some comment. To my ears, the best examples of Andrew Rose’s work on behalf of Furtwängler are the Schubert Ninth from 1942 (coupled with a post-war *Unfinished*), where added bass and a smoothing-off of fierce higher frequencies definitely have a beneficial effect, and the Bruckner Fifth, also from 1942, where the sound frame is again granted extra depth. It’s interesting to compare these transfers with a perfectly acceptable “straight” version of an equally celebrated 1944 Furtwängler Bruckner Eighth with the Vienna Philharmonic issued by Musical Concepts, which, although cleanly focused, lacks the illusion of perspective that Rose contrives for his series.

The 1944 Furtwängler Bruckner Ninth, which was for many years a “historical” staple of the DG catalogue, is the least well recorded of any, and even Rose can’t quite eradicate some of the more crumbly elements of the sound. Performance-wise, all four performances stir the soul and set pulses racing. There’s nothing else like them on disc. Rose has also put out the maddeningly incomplete Bruckner Sixth (coupled with the Telefunken version of the Seventh’s second movement) and the Stuttgart VPO Fourth, with starts with a horn fluff.

**Hermann Abendroth**, although an interesting interpreter, wasn’t quite in Furtwängler’s league, though his many records and broadcasts are always worth hearing. Pristine have released fine Mark Obert-Thorn transfers of various unusual Abendroth 78s, mostly from Berlin in the late 1930s – including a forcefully stated Beethoven Fifth, Liszt’s first two *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, a rather wishy-washy *Finlandia*, Ernő Dohnányi’s “Wedding Cake” Waltz and, most frustratingly, a wartime Paris Conservatoire Orchestra recording of Reger’s *Variations on a Theme of Mozart* that stops short of the work’s crowning glory, its fugue, which was never actually recorded – or at least never released on 78s. Scandalous, I say – though what we do have of the work is compellingly performed.

## THE RECORDINGS

### Schubert Syms Nos 8 & 9 Furtwängler

Pristine Audio © PASC253

### Bruckner Sym No 5 Furtwängler

Pristine Audio © PASC255

### Bruckner Sym No 8 Furtwängler

Musical Concepts © MC109

### Bruckner Sym No 9 Furtwängler

Pristine Audio © PASC251

### Beethoven Sym No 5, etc Abendroth

Pristine Audio © PASC256



# Toscanini in NY, Dohnányi in London

Plus Goossens’s Rimsky and Ormandy’s Bach

**I**n 1945 Furtwängler’s arch-rival across the pond, **Arturo Toscanini**, returned to his old orchestra, the New York Philharmonic Symphony, to conduct their annual Pension Fund concert at Carnegie Hall. These are extremely interesting performances, less frenetic than some of the maestro’s hard-driven later broadcasts, and fairly well transferred on a new Guild CD, though I would have welcomed rather less in the way of filtering. The programme is fairly characteristic, Haydn’s *Clock* Symphony (lean and transparent), a hotfoot trip past *The Pines of Rome*, the bass drum pounding energetically for the final straight, an eloquently drawn account of *The Swan of Tuonela*, a full quota of gravitas for *Siegfried’s Funeral March* (with more music than we usually hear) and, to close, an energetic *Euryanthe* Overture. Also from Guild, a lower-voltage coupling featuring the more temperate art of **Eugene Goossens** in Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sheherazade* (LSO in 1959, stereo, ex-Everest) and Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* in Ravel’s orchestration, recorded with the Royal Philharmonic in 1957 for EMI in mono. Yes, there are nice touches here and there, especially in the Rimsky, but neither performance strikes me as far enough out of the ordinary to warrant special attention.

A disc of Bach transcriptions with the Philadelphia Orchestra under **Eugene Ormandy** parades an exceedingly glamorous tonal profile, the transcribers ranging from Ormandy himself (a sonorous Passacaglia and

Fugue) to Elgar. The recordings date from between 1947 and 1955 and sound exceedingly well. “**Dohnányi in London**”, also from Pristine, offers plenty in the way of musical character, including two fine examples of the composer as pianist, in Mozart’s G major Piano Concerto, K453 (very elegant playing), and Dohnányi’s own *Variations on a Nursery Tune*, with Lawrance Collingwood conducting the LSO. Most of the other items are with the enthusiastic if occasionally scrappy Budapest PO, including rustic, earthy performances of Berlioz’s *Hungarian March* (two versions, recorded two days apart, sounding quite unlike), and, especially enjoyable, Liszt’s First *Hungarian Rhapsody*, both works drenched in local colour. Mark Obert-Thorn has prepared excellent transfers. ©

## THE RECORDINGS

### Haydn. Respighi Orch Wks Toscanini

Guild © GHCD2368

### Rimsky-Korsakov, etc Orch Wks Goossens

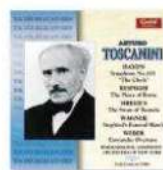
Guild © GHCD2376

### Bach Transcriptions Ormandy

Pristine Audio © PASC211

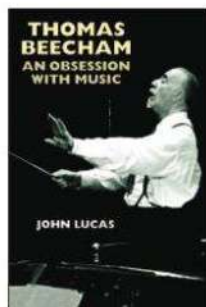
### Various Cpsrs Dohnányi in London Dohnányi

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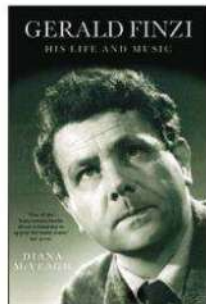
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# Books

Stephen Sondheim is the perfect guide to his own collected lyrics

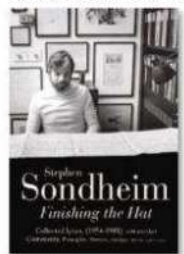
## Finishing the Hat

The Collected Lyrics (1954-1981) of Stephen Sondheim

By Stephen Sondheim

Virgin Books, HB, 470pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-7535-2258-5



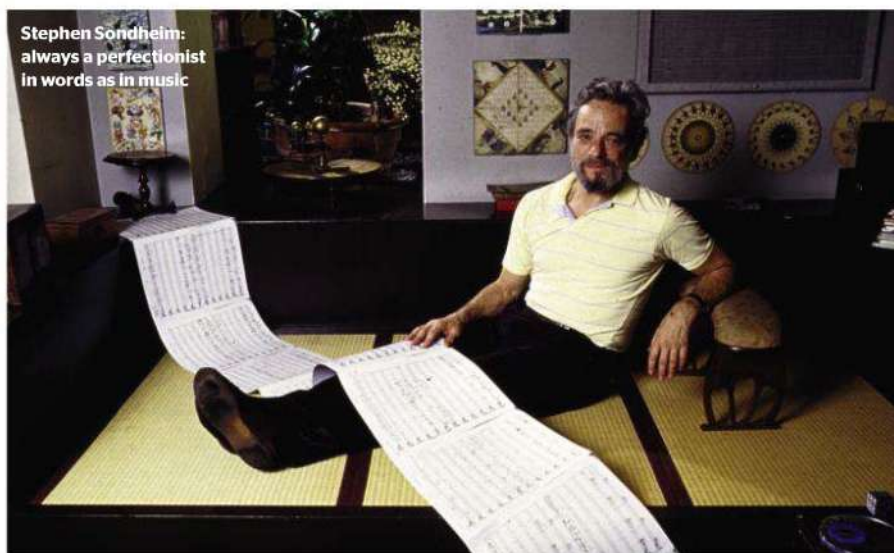
Stephen Sondheim's *Finishing the Hat* is so much more than a hardback compendium of collected lyrics (both published and unpublished), dating from his first foray into musical theatre in 1954

through to *Merrily We Roll Along* in 1981. It's also a fascinating record of 20th-century musical theatre writing, a highly entertaining kaleidoscope of theatrical anecdotes and, perhaps most importantly, a profound exploration of our greatest living musical theatre writer's creative process.

Instantly, Sondheim cuts to the chase, outlining a lyricist's three necessary principles: Content Dictates Form, Less Is More and God Is In The Details – all in the service of clarity. It is against these truisms that he then judges his own work with an excoriating stricture. Among the cardinal sins he himself has committed are: showing off (Maria's line, "It's alarming/ How charming/I feel" in *West Side Story*); tautological use of adjectives (*Saturday Night's* "All things expensive and choice and rare"); mismatching of music and lyrics (in the line "There's a place for us", again in *West Side Story*: the musical phrasing means that the most important word appears to be "a"!).

That Sondheim blushes at his "lyrical sinning" is perhaps unsurprising. However, the book is peppered with one surprise after another – not least Sondheim's assessment of other writers' work. Noël Coward fares badly ("The Master of Blather") due to his seeming lack of generosity towards his audience, while Alan Jay Lerner "belongs to the lower deities in the Pantheon" because of his lyrics' lack of personality. Not even the great Oscar Hammerstein II escapes criticism. There's a witty censure of Hammerstein's persistent and illogical use of bird imagery.

Satisfying insights include Sondheim's preferred method of lyric writing (lying on a couch, using a yellow legal pad and an Eberhard Faber pencil – praised for its soft



lead), the fact that he enjoys writing music much more than lyrics, the memory of hearing Cole Porter gasp with delight at a lyric from *Gypsy* which bolsters the author's ego to this day, and how each new production provides him with a temporary but much-needed sense of "family". For Sondheim, collaboration is the key.

Each show is treated individually and in chronological order. Each chapter opens with a short explanation of the musical's premise, followed by detailed comments about how the show came to exist before an analysis of those extraordinary lyrics. This structure allows the reader to experience the development of the artist across three decades, particularly through references to his many influences. It was Jerome Robbins who, despite his volatile personality and his inclination to humiliate his collaborators in public, taught Sondheim to write songs with the staging in mind. The episode where he and Sondheim create "Rose's Turn" (the finale of *Gypsy*) during a late-night improvisation session is particularly thrilling to read. It was a visit to the Actors Studio with legendary writer and director Arthur Laurents to witness Lee Strasberg leading a class in his high-definition method of acting which engendered in Sondheim a heightened sense of the actor's needs – a talent for which every actor who has ever performed a Sondheim song is grateful.

Then there are the seemingly mountainous challenges, some of which were left by the wayside: for example, the attempt to reflect

contemporaneous American history during the short scene transitions of *Merrily We Roll Along*. Others were achieved in part (the need to combine the colloquial linguistic idiom of New York gangs – "jive talk" – with the highly contrasting, formal Puerto Rican sound in *West Side Story*), while others were achieved par excellence (allowing content to dictate style as well as form in *Pacific Overtures*, with its stark musical and verbal language).

As an actor, I've had the great privilege of working with the author on two of his shows and this book reflects the man: quick-witted, fiercely intelligent and very particular – especially about his lyrics, which often prove a challenge to learn accurately. I still have nightmares about the performance where I invented new lyrics for "Franklin Shepard, Inc", one of Sondheim's most challenging patter songs.

*Finishing the Hat* is an utter delight. It is a must-read for anyone interested in writing for the musical theatre, for any performers wishing to act in musical theatre or anyone who wishes to learn about the creative process from one of the theatre world's giants.

At the very end of the book, following the crushing reaction to *Merrily We Roll Along* when it opened on Broadway (it played for 16 performances only), Sondheim writes tantalisingly, "But then I met James Lapine" (his major collaborator during the 1980s and '90s). I, for one, cannot wait for the second volume to hear what Sondheim did next.

Daniel Evans



# Tune Surfing

James Jolly flies the flag for the Gramophone Player and salutes Grainger and Beecham anniversaries



A recent survey of 3500 *Gramophone* readers revealed a lively interest in the “digital world” of classical music: 44 per cent download from the internet, 39.5 per cent stream music and 53.5 per cent own an MP3 player. My guess is that over the course of the next 12 months the number of people streaming music will increase. It’s definitely a growing trend to use streaming services like Spotify, the Naxos Music Library and Classical Archives, and I encounter more and more people who are happy to “own” the music just for the time it takes to play. Once upon a time I think I would have scoffed at the suggestion, but with shelves groaning under the weight of CDs, combined with a totally incurable desire to listen to more and more music (both the new

and the totally familiar), I have come round to the notion. Opera-mad friends have become similarly obsessed with YouTube for unusual or rare performances that, once upon a time, would have circulated on cassette, VHS and more recently on recorded CD and DVD, but which now are routinely sent round as a link – which of course also speeds up the process!

Now that streaming has become a norm rather than a nice little gimmick to enhance websites, may I steer you towards the *Gramophone* Player if you’ve not explored it. As well as offering longer excerpts (usually a complete movement) of the 10 Editor’s Choice recordings each month, in addition to part of the DVD of the Month which you can watch on the Player, many of the magazine’s other

features – such as The Collection – are now supported by substantial musical excerpts (Rob Cowan’s recent survey of the recordings of the Dvořák Cello Concerto, for example, is supported by performances featuring Angelica May, Pablo Casals and János Starker). But the feature I want to draw your attention to is the Archive Recording. Simply click on the “From the Archive” tab on the Player to access the ever-growing playlist of recordings we’ve had tracked down by Nick Morgan, whose passion for great performances from the past has turned up some gems. Last month we posted a very fine recording of the Liszt Sonata in B minor, made for HMV by the inimitable Shura Cherkassky, which sounds very impressive in this transfer. We’ve also Archiv recordings of Bach cantatas directed by Fritz Lehmann – despite all the developments in historically informed performance practice, these two interpretations (Cantatas Nos 39 and 105) speak with extraordinary power and poise. Another all-but-forgotten Archiv LP that the Player features is a collection of songs by Thomas Campian (or Campion), John Danyel and John Dowland sung with great subtlety by René Soames. And from the French pianist Ginette Doyen – by and large forgotten but in her time a very important musician in her native France, and wife of the violinist Jean Fournier – we’ve a programme of piano pieces by Chabrier and Saint-Saëns played with great style. All these recordings are free to listen to (the only thing you’ll need to do is register at [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) in order to access the *Gramophone* Player).

## The essential download playlist No 39 Percy Grainger

Choral works [English Country Gardiner Orch / Gardiner \(Philips\)](#) [DG](#), [IT](#), [A](#), [Am](#)

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Piano works [Marc-André Hamelin \(Hyperion\)](#) [H](#), [IT](#)

Piano transcriptions [Piers Lane \(Hyperion\)](#) [H](#), [IT](#)

Songs [Della Jones; Penelope Thwaites et al \(Chandos\)](#) [CO](#), [CS](#), [A](#), [Am](#)

[Grieg](#) Piano Concerto [Grainger; Kristiansand SO / Rolf Gupta \(2L\)](#) [IT](#)

[A](#) = Ariama [Am](#) = Amazon [CO](#) = Classics Online [CS](#) = Classical Shop [DG](#) = DG Webshop [H](#) = Hyperion [IT](#) = iTunes

Talking of archive recordings, Pristine Classical ([pristineclassical.com](http://pristineclassical.com)) has now developed a really appealing sense of community around its historic issues and reissues. Pristine’s founder Andrew Rose keeps up a lively blog, and each transfer has – in the style of a wine catalogue’s tasting notes – a short explanation of the challenges of remastering that particular original. And Pristine keeps coming up with great treasures. Having played the (stereo) Julius Katchen recording of Ernő von Dohnányi’s *Variations on a Nursery Theme* on my Radio 3 programme recently, I was interested to hear how Pristine had managed with the already impressive Decca sound (Kenneth Wilkinson engineering in Kingsway Hall in January 1959). Well, a splendid job has been done and



the performance sounds considerably younger than its 51 years (the transfer was made from quarter-track stereo open-reel Ampex tape at 7.5 inches per second). The *Nursery Variations* is one of those works that has almost entirely disappeared from the repertoire (never heard in concert and increasingly rarely on disc): a real shame because it's a charmer and delightfully witty. Sir Adrian Boult, tongue firmly in cheek, draws some terrific playing from the LPO, and Katchen is on quite magnificent form. What a sad loss to the piano world when he died in 1969, still in his early forties. The coupled *Paganini Rhapsody* by Rachmaninov is similarly glittering and fleet of finger.

As Sir Thomas Beecham is much in the mind this year (he died on March 8, 1961), it's worth mentioning Pristine's very fine transfer of his Brahms Second Symphony (Abbey Road, 1958) and *Academic Festival Overture* (Abbey Road, 1956) – both in stereo – with Delius's *North Country Sketches* (a mono recording from 1949). William Mann, writing in *Gramophone* in July 1960, was admiring of the interpretation of the Brahms Second, believing it to be “a fine performance rather than one that makes me think anew about the music. Beecham finds the sunlight and the vivacity in the work; one senses the play of a brilliant interpretative mind upon great music”. I surrender to the Beecham magic nearly every time – as I think WSM did too.

If you crave fine broadcast sound, BBC Radio 3 has launched what it styles “HD Sound” from the BBC website ([bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)). If you choose to listen live over the web you will be treated to 320kbps sound which – provided you're listening via a decent pair of speakers or headphones – is pretty good. It might also be an excuse to explore relaying your music wirelessly around your house/flat. I've mentioned Network Music Players on many occasions, but if you have pledged your allegiance to Apple you might like to explore the company's latest wireless system, Airplay, which allows you to play audio and video from your Apple product (iPad, iPhones, iPod Touches) to compatible hardware that plays the software (Apple TVs as well as third-party kit that has signed up to this new system). It's not a million miles away from Airport Express but it'll soon come as standard – and of course you'll be able to control it using your iPhone or iPad. And it's good to know that reputable audio companies of the calibre of Denon, Marantz, Bowers & Wilkins, JBL and iHome will be adding the interface to their products. Here's yet another step towards integrating your computing and entertainment worlds. 🎧

## BLOGWATCH

[www.getclassical.org](http://www.getclassical.org)



**Berlin-born, New York-based journalist Ilona Oltuski meets Israeli cellist Inbal Segev, who describes her love story with the cello**

“I breathed cello,” Segev remembers. She talks about her love for the instrument that has dominated her life. She was only five years old when her mother, a high-school teacher, introduced her to classical music broadcasts. Some of these featured the cello, leading to Segev's first cello lessons. When, at age seven, her exceptional talent became apparent, the America Israel Cultural Foundation (AICF) provided for her education at the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem.

Her love story with the cello continues to this day. “The cello is more than a beautiful instrument, it's my friend,” says Segev, meanwhile a mother of three. “Fortunately, my husband and my parents have helped me tremendously to maintain a balance between my career and my family,” she was quoted as saying in an interview with *Cosmos* in 2008. She recalls how her mom and grandmother had made it possible to buy her first good instrument, a Gaetano Rossi. When she got married, her husband knew how much she would love an “upgrade”. With the help of a loan

from his employer, her new cello was a 1673 instrument built by Francesco Ruggieri, a contemporary of Stradivarius.

She also remembers one of many times her family supported her spontaneously and without hesitation:

“I was pregnant with the twins when I got a call from Christian Steiner at two in the afternoon. There was an emergency cancellation of a cellist who was supposed to perform that same night, and Christian wanted me to fill in. My husband rushed to the car rental and returned to chauffeur me and my cello for the four-hour ride. Steiner, artistic director of Tannery Pond, was thrilled that I made it in time, pregnant and all.”

Segev's last-minute performance at the prestigious summer chamber music series in the Berkshires was a big success; in 2010, she returned for the third time, with pianist Alon Goldstein. When I met with her just before the great snowstorm at the end of December, she had just returned from an Israeli Consulate co-sponsored concert tour that had taken Goldstein and her to Beijing and Zhengzhou.

Every now and again, “old” connections even create new opportunities. This was the case when Goldstein recently introduced Segev to Avner Dorman, the young Israeli composer whose *Mandolin Concerto* just received a Grammy nomination. Dorman will now compose a cello concerto for Segev.

“It will be an interesting process,” she says. “I wanted something Middle Eastern for the cello. It's going to be difficult, but I like challenging scores.”

Dorman's composition will not be the first concerto written for her: accompanied by the Polish Radio National Symphony, she recorded a cello concerto by American composer Max Schubel for the Opus One label in 2001. Neither will it be the first recording with a Jewish connotation.

“I discovered I have something to offer there,” says Segev, who does not describe herself as observant but rather as someone who likes a little bit of tradition. As an Israeli, she also strongly identifies with her cultural heritage.

### On [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk)

The *Gramophone Player* is now online. The *Gramophone Player* features a huge amount of media for you to stream, including longer excerpts from the monthly Editor's Choice recordings, in-vision excerpts, a complete recording every month related to one of the magazine's main features – and much, much more!





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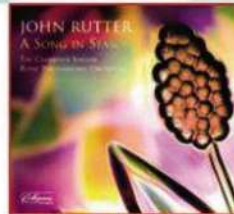
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# Musical Journeys

Versailles

Brisbane

Vienna

## Bringing Bellérophon back to life

**Martin Cullingford** sees the Palace of Versailles host one of its great operatic triumphs from a past age



Christophe Rousset  
and cast perform  
Lully's Bellérophon

### Versailles

The Palace of Versailles glistens, an exuberance of Baroque grandeur in the freshly fallen snow. Here the mob may have marched, ushering in the end of the *Ancien Régime* and a decade of violence, but today the great front court contains merely muffled sounds of tourist talk, while the park that falls away in ordered elegance to the beautiful Trianon Palaces beyond sighs with the silence of Christmas-card escapism.

If disorder seems far away, that may have been how Marie Antoinette felt, sitting in the recreational rusticity of her fairy-tale grotto, when fate came rudely knocking at the gate. She defiantly declined the carriage waiting to whisk her to safety but may have better benefited from the winged horse Pegasus, or from the help of the heroic Bellerophon in place of her hapless husband, Louis XVI. Perhaps such thoughts crossed her mind as she was driven forever from the palace and peace, for the last time Jean-Baptiste Lully's opera based on that myth was performed – until this revival by harpsichordist and founding-conductor of Les Talens Lyriques, Christophe Rousset – was here in 1773.

The Opéra Royale, where it was staged then and now, followed the rest of the palace by a century, being finished in 1770, in time for the wedding of Marie Antoinette. Perched at the end of the north wing, post-Revolutionary life found it, at one point, being remodelled to house the French senate. But in 1957 it was restored to its *Ancien Régime* appearance, and it has just reopened again following €13.5m worth of work. It is built entirely in wood, painted to look like marble. But then all at Versailles is artifice of a sort. If the decadent excess of the famed Hall of Mirrors was politics-as-architecture, here, in this exquisite 18th-century court auditorium, was politics-as-theatre – whether in the operas' plot-lines or simply just the sheer grandeur of the presentation.

A century before 1770, composer Jean-Baptiste Lully held a position in Louis XIV's court shared by few artists of any discipline, having achieved both a personal rapport with the monarch himself and a virtual monopoly on operatic composition. Intriguingly, given the monarch's desire to Frenchify everything – Bellini was sent home after his plans for redeveloping the Tuileries were considered a little too Italian – Lully was also Italian, and furthermore of low birth. But perhaps the young King liked the outsider: his own power did not, after all, rest on centuries of acquired mystique, the Bourbon hold on power being only 50 years old, an insecurity Versailles was in part built to address.

*Bellérophon* had been a triumph when premiered in 1679 at Paris's Palais Royal, playing for nine months and earning frequent interruptions from the King for sections to be reprised. It certainly contains some delightful duet writing, as well as some gripping rhythmic sections which Rousset conducted with his characteristic instinctive drive – and a heartfelt chapeau here must also go to the percussionist.

"Everybody agreed that M De Lully has surpassed himself and this last creation was his masterpiece," wrote a French newspaper at the time. And yet *Bellérophon* is the last of Lully's operas to have received a modern revival, something Rousset says "we had to correct".

"It really sounds great," he enthuses. "The plot is great, the tension, the drama is really strong and works – it would be an achievement to put that on stage and see it as a proper show and see how wonderful it is."

This was a concert performance. Rousset describes the idea of a full staging as "a dream" and hopes his performance here will be sufficient advocacy to unlock the necessary funding. It would certainly be dramatic, with descents into hell and our hero riding Pegasus up to the Gods, quite in keeping with the excess of the one-time Versailles court. But in the meantime, there's a recording being released in the Spring. *Bellérophon* is released by Aparte; hear more on the Gramophone podcast




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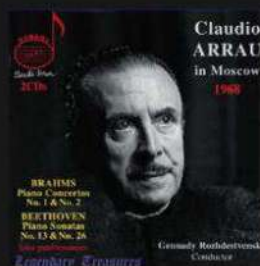
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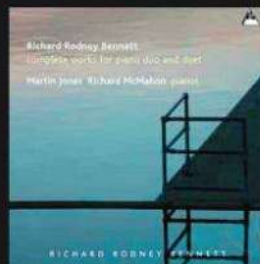
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**MUSICAL JOURNEYS**


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**Charlotte Smith** attends a rare performance of Havergal Brian's *Gothic Symphony* in Australia

**Brisbane**

**M**ake no mistake; Havergal Brian's *Gothic Symphony* is big. From the titanic 180-piece orchestra to the 300-strong choir, this two-hour colossus is not to be taken lightly.

Witnessing the staging at Queensland's Performing Arts Centre in Brisbane, it is possible to imagine the Herculean task of organising a live performance, and to understand why the work has previously been performed just four times since its completion in 1927. The stage is barely sufficient to contain the musicians, who spill precariously to its very edges, and the sound of the full forces is ear-shattering.

Staging the *Gothic Symphony* is a challenge that has consumed and frustrated executive producer Gary Thorpe for 30 years. General manager of Brisbane classical radio station 4MBS, Thorpe began lobbying for a Queensland *Gothic* performance in 1989. Some five attempts later, his vision has finally come to pass. Often unfairly regarded as a poor musical cousin of Sydney and Melbourne, Brisbane lacks the artistic resources of the larger cities. But Thorpe has gathered community choirs from around the state and musicians from several Australian orchestras.

Conducting the production is John Curro, veteran music

director of the Queensland Youth Symphony, who himself has gathered a number of QYS alumni. Playing to a sold-out audience, the \$325,000 one-off event must surely be judged a success and, if microphoning the choir seems a slight cheat, it's a forgivable concession.

But why attempt to stage a work Henry Wood described as "unperformable"? Is not the *Gothic* more a testament to musical record-breaking than creative genius? Havergal Brian has frequently been dismissed as an outdated Romantic. Not so, says Brian expert Malcolm MacDonald, who in an illuminating pre-concert lecture reveals the composer's astute understanding of 20th-century trends. In fact the symphony is not the great plodding dinosaur it has sometimes been labelled, but an encyclopedia of musical styles. In a world decimated by war, Brian sifted through the aspirations of the past and reconnected with a lost idealism.

"He who strives with all his might, that man we can redeem," quotes Brian from Goethe's *Faust* at the work's opening and in many ways this Queensland production shares that ambition. "So many things needed to be precisely co-ordinated to have a remote chance of success," says Curro. Yet, undeterred, the Queensland team have risen to the challenge and won. ©





On song: John Malkovich  
as Casanova in Vienna

John Malkovich's second operatic project is as convincing as the first, finds **AJ Goldman**

## Vienna

**D**id the infamous seducer and polymath Giacomo Casanova have a hand in writing the libretto for *Don Giovanni*? That tantalising question was the creative seed for *The Giacomo Variations*, a self-described "chamber opera play" that had its premiere in January at Vienna's Ronacher Theater and starred John Malkovich as Casanova. Conceived by writer-director Michael Sturminger and conductor Martin Haselböck, the evening interspersed scenes drawn from Casanova's memoirs with music from Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte's three operas.

This show reunited director, conductor and actor, who previously collaborated on *The Infernal Comedy*, a production about the Austrian serial killer Jack Unterwieser. "It originated with [Haselböck's] idea of bringing to life the late-18th-century tradition of melodrama," explained Sturminger, referring to a genre that combined spoken declamation with background music. "It's an attempt to find Casanova's soul through da Ponte's scenes and Mozart's music." The play will be seen in Australia, Russia, Finland, France and Germany later this year.

Amid the elegant sets and costumes, the musical scenes developed sometimes startlingly

out of the dramatic ones. And director and conductor had taken pains to find dramatically appropriate points of entry into the music.

Appearing alongside Malkovich was the elegant Lithuanian actress Ingeborga Dapkūnaitė as the writer Elsa von der Recke. As Elsa pleads with Casanova to publish the story of his life, the ageing chevalier relives his exploits in a surreal series of operatic flashbacks, which feature two dramatically versatile young singers as Casanova and Elsa's musical doppelgängers (soprano Sophie Klusmann and baritone Florian Boesch). And there was attentive work from the period-instrument ensemble Orchester Wiener Akademie.

One of the evening's biggest surprises was hearing Malkovich sing. He crooned with a lilting voice that was also surprisingly accurate. His performance brought to mind the long tradition of non-singing actors taking on singing roles and, in Vienna of all places, the *Zauberflöte* librettist Emanuel Schikaneder, who also starred as Papageno. "John could easily sing Papageno if he wanted to," said Sturminger. "You don't need to have a lyrical voice. You need a character. I think it's something really wonderful because it brings air into this *bel canto* ideal and opens it up because it makes it more direct." ●

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# The Best Events Worldwide

James Levine conducts a Boston Birtwistle premiere, Daniel Barenboim performs Beethoven in Vienna and Salisbury Cathedral hosts Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* conducted by Edward Gardner

**I**  
March

## Paris Opéra Bastille

Opéra National de Paris presents Wagner's *Siegfried* conducted by Philippe Jordan with Torsten

Kerl in the title-role on March 1, 11, 15, 18, 22, 27 and 30. Details: +33 1 7125 2423 /

[www.operadeparis.fr](http://www.operadeparis.fr)

**3**  
March

## Boston Symphony Hall

James Levine conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the world premiere of Birtwistle's new work for violin and orchestra with soloist Christian Tetzlaff on March 3, 4, 5 and 8. Also performed are Bartók's Violin Concerto No 2 and Mozart's Rondo, K373.

Details: +1 888 266 1200 / [www.bso.org](http://www.bso.org)



Steven Isserlis performs with Joshua Bell in London

**4**  
March

## London Cadogan Hall

The Academy of St Martin in the Fields conducted by Ian Brown perform Haydn's Symphony No 13, Mendelssohn's Symphony No 4 (*Italian*), and Brahms's Concerto for Violin and Cello with soloists Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis. Details: +44 (0)20 7730 4500 / [www.cadoganhall.com](http://www.cadoganhall.com)

**10**  
March

## Tel Aviv Performing Arts Center

Israeli Opera presents Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* conducted by Keri-Lynn Wilson with Anna Shefajinskaia and Larissa Tetuev as Katerina Izmailova on March 10-13 and 15-19. Details: +972 3 692 7777 / [www.israel-opera.co.il](http://www.israel-opera.co.il)

**10**  
March

## Los Angeles

### Walt Disney Concert Hall

Gustavo Dudamel conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic in an all-Tchaikovsky programme featuring *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* on March 10, 11, 12 and 13. Details: +1 323 850 2000 / [www.laphil.com](http://www.laphil.com)

**11**  
March

## Birmingham Symphony Hall

Thomas Adès joins the London Sinfonietta to conduct his own *In Seven Days*, a "concerto for piano with moving image" with soloist Nicolas Hodges. The orchestra are joined by the amplified voices of Synergy Vocals to perform Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*.

Details: +44 (0)121 780 3333 /

[www.londonsinfonietta.org.uk](http://www.londonsinfonietta.org.uk)

**17**  
March

## Llandudno Venue Cymru

Welsh National Opera presents Johann Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus* on March 17 and 18, conducted by Thomas Rosner. Further performances take place in Cardiff, Birmingham, Southampton, Bristol, Plymouth and Milton Keynes throughout February, March and April. Details: +44 (0)1492 872000 / [www.wno.org.uk](http://www.wno.org.uk)

**18**  
March

## Perth (Australia) Concert Hall

Paul Daniel conducts the West Australian Symphony Orchestra in Rachmaninov's Symphony No 2, and Sibelius's Violin Concerto with soloist Henning Kraggerud, on March 18 and 19. Details: +61 8 9326 0000 / [www.waso.com.au](http://www.waso.com.au)

**19**  
March

## Dortmund Konzerthaus

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra conducted by Robin Ticciati perform Berlioz's Overture to *Béatrice et Bénédict*, Kurtág's *Hommage à R. S. C. H.*, Schumann's Symphony No 4, and Chopin's Piano Concerto No 2 with soloist Pierre-Laurent Aimard. Further performances take place in Cologne, Essen, Heidelberg and Vienna. Details: +49 231 2269 6200 / [www.mahler-chamber.de](http://www.mahler-chamber.de)

**19**  
March

## Vienna Musikverein

Daniel Barenboim conducts the Vienna Philharmonic in Schoenberg's *Pelleas and Melisande*, and performs Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 1, directing from the keyboard, on March 19 and 20. Details: +43 1 505 81 90 / [www.wienerphilharmoniker.at](http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at)

**24**  
March

## Savannah Music Festival

The Savannah Music Festival runs from March 24 to April 9 with classical, jazz, American

and world music. The classical programme features pianists Sebastian Knauer and Simone Dinnerstein, violinist Daniel Hope, soprano Christine Brewer, the Synergy Brass Quintet, Stile Antico, the Ebène Quartet and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

Details: +1 912 525 5050 /

[www.savannahmusicfestival.org](http://www.savannahmusicfestival.org)

**24**  
March

## Singapore Esplanade Concert Hall

The Singapore Symphony Orchestra conducted by Rossen Milanov perform Mozart's Ballet Music from *Idomeneo*, Shostakovich's Symphony No 5, and Grieg's Piano Concerto with soloist Dang Thai Son. Details: +65 6348 5555 / [www.sso.org.sg](http://www.sso.org.sg)

**25**  
March

## Edinburgh Usher Hall

Neeme Järvi conducts the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in Dvořák's *Serenade for Strings* and Shostakovich's Symphony No 7 (*Leningrad*) on March 24 and 25. Details: +44 (0)131 228 1155 / [www.rsno.org.uk](http://www.rsno.org.uk)

**26**  
March

## New York Carnegie Hall

The Toronto Symphony Orchestra perform Britten's *Four Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes*, Bruch's Violin Concerto No 1 with violinist Itzhak Perlman, John Estacio's *Frenergy* and Vaughan Williams's Symphony No 4 conducted by Peter Oundjian. Details: +1 212 247 7800 / [www.carnegiehall.org](http://www.carnegiehall.org)



Hear Christine Rice in *Gerontius* at Salisbury Cathedral

**27**  
March

## Salisbury Cathedral

Edward Gardner conducts the London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra and the Choir of Clare College in Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with mezzo Christine Rice, tenor Paul Groves and bass Alistair Miles. Details: +44 (0)1722 320333 / [www.salisburycathedral.org.uk](http://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk)



# High Fidelity

**News and reviews** of the latest in audio, home cinema and new technology

## Primare boosts range with new amplifier and CD player

New from Swedish audio manufacturer Primare is a pair of high-end stereo audio components: the CD32 player and I32 amplifier will sell for £2200 each. The CD32 uses a dedicated CD transport rather than the kind of DVD-ROM drive increasingly found in players, with a five-second buffer for optimal playback. The transport can play MP3 and WMA files, and the player also has a USB input for the same file formats on memory devices.

There's user-selectable upconversion to 96kHz, and the player has twin DACs and digital filtering from Burr-Brown. Signal paths are short, with no capacitors, and analogue and digital circuits are supplied from separate windings on the transformer. Output is on both RCA phonos and balanced XLRs, plus AES/EBU, phono and optical digital.

The I32 amplifier delivers 2x120W using the company's Ultra-Fast Power Device technology. Based on Class D working, this adjusts feedback continuously to minimise distortion, regardless of load.

It has two sets of balanced XLR inputs and three sets of RCA phono inputs, plus pre-out and record sockets. There will be an option of



an upgrade board providing USB, iPod and Ethernet connectivity, and the amplifier can also be used with the new R32 moving magnet/moving coil phono pre-amplifier, which sells for £850.

Again, power is from an R-core transformer, kept as far as possible from the main circuitboard within the case, and the R32 has user-adjustable gain and impedance, plus a 5dB gain boost if required for low-output moving magnet cartridges.

**Primare**

[www.primare.net](http://www.primare.net)

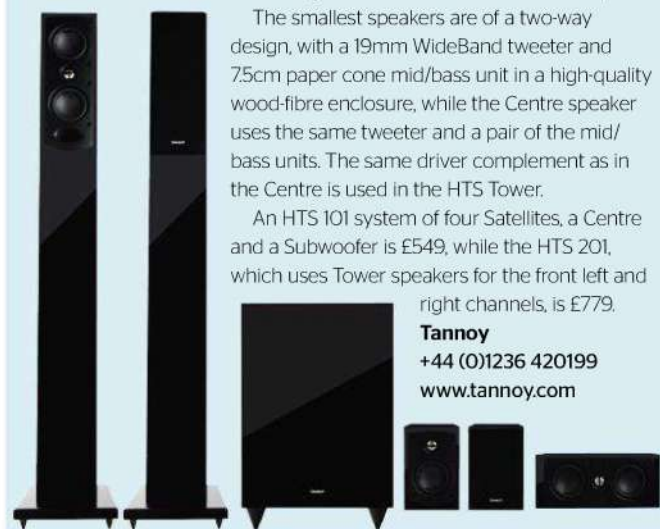
## TANNOY turns on the surround sound style

Tannoy's latest range is HTS, ultra-compact speakers combining style with "no-compromise" performance. The range is built around two basic models - the HTS Satellite and the HTS Tower, a dedicated Centre and a Subwoofer with a downward-firing 20cm driver unit and 100W amplifier.

The smallest speakers are of a two-way design, with a 19mm WideBand tweeter and 7.5cm paper cone mid/bass unit in a high-quality wood-fibre enclosure, while the Centre speaker uses the same tweeter and a pair of the mid/bass units. The same driver complement as in the Centre is used in the HTS Tower.

An HTS 101 system of four Satellites, a Centre and a Subwoofer is £549, while the HTS 201, which uses Tower speakers for the front left and right channels, is £779.

**Tannoy**  
+44 (0)1236 420199  
[www.tannoy.com](http://www.tannoy.com)



## COMING SOON

### HRT's simple iPod streamer

Due in the shops very soon is the iStreamer, from US manufacturer High Resolution Technologies. Based on the design of its successful range of USB-connected computer streaming devices, the £195 unit has a USB socket able to accept the standard "sync lead" supplied with iPods, iPhones and iPads, and outputs audio via a pair of analogue sockets. Once connected, the mobile device is used as normal but its audio output is routed through the connected system, making this a simple solution for systems lacking dedicated iPod inputs. It'll be distributed in the UK by Audiofreaks.

### A car lined with speakers

It may only be a concept but Jaguar's C-X75 gives some strong hints of how the company's future vehicles will look. It combines a diesel engine with power-generating turbines, plus a motor for each wheel, and the audio has a very unusual speaker layout, courtesy of Bowers & Wilkins. Jaguar's suppliers were encouraged to "get crazy" with the design of the car, so the doors and bulkheads are lined with over 250 minute directional B&W drive units, each about the size of the speaker used in a mobile phone.

## Gear4's instant iPod remote

Gear4's new UnityRemote turns Apple's iPod Touch, iPhone and iPad into universal



remote controls. Using the combination of a free app downloaded from the iTunes Store and a battery-powered infrared sender, the £99 package uses Bluetooth communication between the handheld device and the sender, and has user-customisable menu screens so commands for different devices can be combined, or whole sequences programmed, for example to switch on system components and select inputs.

**Gear4**

+44 (0)1494 435 530  
[www.gear4.co.uk](http://www.gear4.co.uk)



## EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

# The latest wireless music developments

The way we connect our systems is changing: slowly, but it's happening, says **Tony Williams**

Last month this page took a look at the way connectivity in audio systems is changing: these days you're as likely to be connecting up an HDMI or Ethernet cable to play your music as a conventional phono pair or digital interconnect. But there are also signs that, just as home computer networking has gone from pulling Ethernet cables to wireless connections, so audio systems are increasingly turning to the airwaves to distribute music. It's not hard to see the appeal: freed from the need to wire "zones" together, getting music in another room is now just a matter of having the right hardware connected to your main system and then plugging in a receiver where you want audio.

Of course, there have been systems able to do this for a while: Yamaha's MusicCAST system seemed a miracle when it was first launched, and Sonos has made a real success of components able to access and control music anywhere you want. Sonos now has stand-alone receiver/speakers, able to be plugged in for instant playback in extra rooms, or paired up – the intelligent software deciding which is the left channel and which the right. There's a wireless dock able to make your iPod or iPhone a music store for whole-house music – or indeed allow a visitor to drop in their player for instant use – and as well as the smart Sonos Controller dedicated hardware, the whole thing can now be "driven" via a wireless network using a free app on an iPod, iPhone or iPad.

By the way, expect to see a lot more of those control apps on Apple devices – and maybe even Android mobile phones – as networked audio devices become more common: once a receiver or system is connected to a home wireless network for streaming or internet radio, it's possible for such remote control to be implemented over the network using the built-in Wi-Fi on these mobile devices. Or, as you can read opposite, they can be controlled directly using even simpler systems, again taking advantage of the mobiles' built-in connectivity.

A few months back we looked at simple audio connectivity devices from the computer accessory companies, but recent months have seen the same solutions being offered by manufacturers with a more established audio background. They're doing so both for wireless distribution between rooms and as a means of solving one of the major stumbling-blocks for surround sound at home: cabling for the rear speakers.

German direct-sell speaker manufacturer Teufel is no stranger to these pages and its RearStation solution, selling for around £269, allows existing rear speakers to be run wirelessly. It comprises a stereo transmitter/receiver system, the receiver unit having a 2x30W amplifier. As well as making wireless rear speakers possible, you can also use it for room-to-room connectivity: it'll work over 20m, and up to three receivers can be connected to a single "sender", each additional unit costing a further £179.

From an unfamiliar name comes an even more comprehensive system: Rocketfish is an in-house brand of US-based retailer Best Buy, which has recently moved into the UK market. Its basic Wireless HD Audio Starter Kit (£160) comprises a transmitter and a 2x22W receiver/amplifier, again able to be used for wireless rear speakers or room-to-room working.

The difference here is that the sender has four-channel input, and can thus, with the addition of an extra receiver/amplifier (£100), make all four rear channels of a 7.1-channel surround system wireless, or deliver different audio streams to two separate rooms, with up to nine receiver/amplifiers able to be used with a single sender.

Suddenly the ability of modern AV receivers to deliver audio into one or more extra "zones" begins to make sense: with the addition of these wireless devices, you really can walk from room to room and continue to enjoy the same music you were listening to on the main system.

It's taken a while but the home of the future is at last beginning to take shape: next stop, wireless HD video distribution, too. It'll never happen? It already is... ☺



## Infidelities Andrew Everard

**One release, so many formats**

There's a lot of talk around the audiophile forums, and indeed on the *Gramophone* one, about computer-stored and physical audio formats. Should one be ripping discs as .wav, .flac, .aac, .mp3, buying CDs or SACDs, downloading files at CD quality, or even searching for internet sites offering even higher resolutions?

Or is it better to hope that the Blu-ray format will expand its audio-only offering, making high-quality discs able to be played even on relatively inexpensive hardware? After all, £100 will buy you a very decent BD player these days.

The solution, as I discovered when compiling this month's round-up of the best-sounding releases for my monthly Super Audio Corner, is already here – and it comes from one of the smaller labels.

I'm a big admirer of Norwegian label 2L, and listening to its "Kind" recording I started delving deeper into what this two-disc package had to offer. On the surface, you have LPCM stereo and DTS-HD 5.0-channel, both at 192kHz/24-bit, on the Blu-ray disc, plus a hybrid CD/SACD disc in the same package.

However, with your Blu-ray player connected to a home network, you can also copy the whole disc in a choice of 192/24 or 96/24 FLAC, CD-quality WAV or MP3; you just access the player via a web browser and away you go, using the mShuttle technology on the disc.

In other words, it has just about every format anyone could ever want, all in one package, for home listening, playing in the car or copying to a handheld player or phone.

Now why can't all releases be like that?

**Andrew Everard**  
Audio Editor



**'Every file format you could want, in one package'**

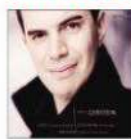


## ROTEL RDG-1520

## Streaming tuner brings radio up to date

Rotel's latest radio device is much more than a way to listen to Radio 3, says Andrew Everard

## THE TEST MUSIC



LISZT. SCHUMANN.

KNUSSEN Piano works

Kirill Gerstein *pf*

Myrios © MYRO05

You don't need orchestral dynamics to give a system a work-out: the delicacy of this disc proves just as testing.



Before you unbox the latest Rotel component, there's a clue to what you're letting yourself in for: the RDG model number prefix is a new one for the company, and the explanation is on the packaging. It may look like a radio tuner but in fact this is a "Rotel Digital Gateway", able to tune to internet radio stations as well as DAB and FM, stream music from a computer or storage device over a home network, and accept direct digital connections from a range of devices.

Yes, like many other consumer electronics companies, Rotel is making the move into home streaming. It has an all-in-one solution, the £1195 RCX-1500 streaming CD receiver, for those wanting to do no more than add a pair of speakers, sit back and listen, but it's also accommodating those with an existing Rotel system with the arrival of the £795 RDG-1520 we have here, designed to match the rest of the 15 Series components. And if you have a system made up from the components of the company's junior 06 Series, there's the £650 RT-09 internet/DAB/FM tuner. The

RDG-1520 is still a radio tuner, with separate antenna inputs for its FM RDS and DAB tuners, and 30 presets across the two bands. However, that's just the start of what this unit can do: it also has a choice of wireless Wi-Fi or Ethernet wired network connection to a home broadband installation, allowing it to access a choice of what's now estimated at around 15,000 internet radio stations, plus a variety of premium streaming services.

It can be set up remotely via Rotel's internet radio portal, where favourite internet radio stations can also be selected, and the RDG-1520 can handle internet radio streams in MP3, WMA, Ogg Vorbis, AAC and AAC+, the format determined by the streaming service. In addition, there are both optical and electrical digital input sockets, to which external source components can be connected, and a front-panel USB socket for memory devices such as USB "sticks", from which it will handle WMA and MP3 files. This socket also allows the direct digital connection of iPods and iPhones, bypassing the Apple player's onboard conversion and

analogue stages and feeding the signal to the Rotel's internal DACs, which are made by Wolfson and offer 24-bit/192kHz capability.

Slightly unusual is the way the Rotel goes about handling network connections: rather than having an Ethernet socket on the rear panel and a simple screw-on connector for a stubby rubber Wi-Fi antenna, there's just another USB socket on the rear panel, with Ethernet and IEEE802.11b/g Wi-Fi adapter dongles supplied in the box.

The arrangement feels a bit clunky compared to the connectivity offered on rival products such as the Marantz NA7004, even though of course the Rotel has Wi-Fi as standard, unlike the Marantz. And there is a caveat – I'll come to that in a moment.

Once set up, the Rotel will stream from PCs or Macs with sharing enabled, with direct streaming from PCs running Windows Media Player 11 or above, or Macs with suitable UPnP (Universal Plug and Play) software, and of course will also work with network-attached storage (NAS) drives, provided they're running suitable UPnP



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software. Among the formats possible are WMA, MP3, WAV, AAC and FLAC, which should suit all but the Applecentric. Those wanting to stream Apple Lossless music files will need software able to transcode on the fly: for example, Elgato's EyeConnect will do the trick for Mac-based content.

## PERFORMANCE

That capability, however, does depend on actually getting the Rotel on to the network in the first place. I had no problems whatsoever with the little USB/Ethernet dongle supplied: once the device was plugged in and the network detected, I was streaming music from both servers and internet within minutes. The wireless dongle was a different matter: despite being just a few metres from my wireless router, the Rotel showed "low signal", and repeatedly dropped internet radio stations. Similarly, though it could see my various streaming devices, it showed "empty" when I tried to access their music stores. It would seem that this third-party device is rather letting the side down: Rotel needs to take another look at its choice, or users should budget for a better Wi-Fi-to-USB "bridge".


It's also worth pointing out that the unit has separate antenna inputs for DAB and FM, so either two aerials or a splitter will be needed, and that the socket marked "Computer I/O" on the rear does allow a computer to be connected, but only to control the unit, not to feed audio from it.

There's even a little fix to tone down the unit's bright blue ring of light around the main power switch but it's rather basic: a self-adhesive mask is provided, to attach to the fascia if the lamp's too bright.

What the Rotel lacks in smooth set-up, it repays in performance. As I've come to expect from the company's current products, and in particular the upmarket 15 Series, the RDG-1520 sounds very good indeed across a range of material, from analogue and digital radio to a variety of online and streamed

content. Playing files stored at a decent bit-rate from my iPhone showed the benefits of the high-quality digital input, with plenty of power, detail and ambience apparent even with 256kbps files, and things even better at 320kbps. The same is true with internet radio: of course, the Rotel can't make really low bit-rate content sound anything but rather spare and clinical; but feed it the likes of my favourite Avro Klassiek stations from the Netherlands and you have a sound to put Radio 3's terrestrial DAB service to shame.

But this "tuner" really shines with CD-quality rips streamed from the home network, where it's able to show just how viable is the concept of storing all your music for instant access. The sound is rich, well-balanced and packed with detail, not to mention having an open and involving treble that makes the most of recorded ambience.

This isn't the only streaming tuner on the market and it's likely to find itself in an ever more crowded arena. But if you don't want to put all your eggs in one streaming device basket, or you simply want to add a wide range of capabilities to an existing system – particularly if it's a Rotel system – it's well worth a serious look, and a lengthy audition. 

## ROTEL RDG-1520

**Type** FM/DAB/internet radio tuner/streaming client

**Price** £795

**Digital-to-analogue conversion** 192kHz/24-bit

**Inputs** Optical/electrical digital, front panel USB for memory "sticks" and iPod/iPhone, rear panel USB for Ethernet and Wi-Fi, FM and DAB antennae

**Outputs** Analogue audio on RCA phono

**Other connections** Computer control interface, infrared remote input, 12V trigger

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset, Ethernet and IEEE802.11b/g wireless adapters, DAB and FM antennae

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 43.1x9.9x31.2cm

**Made by** Rotel, Japan

**Distributed by** Rotel Europe, Dale Road, Worthing, W Sussex BN11 2BH

**Tel** +44 (0)1903 221 761

**www.rotel.com**

## SUPER AUDIO CORNER

**A closer look at, and listen to, some recent high-definition recordings**



### 'KIND'

Ensemble 96 / Nidaros String Quartet / Kjetil Alménning  
2L  2L-076SABD


This disc of contemporary lullabies and Norwegian cradle songs carries stereo 24-bit/192kHz PCM and FLAC, 24/92kHz FLAC, WAV and MP3 plus 5.1-channel DTS-HD Master Audio on a Blu-ray disc, and SACD on a bonus disc.

The music here sounds lovely in the various stereo formats and takes on a whole new life in the superb wrap-around SACD and DTS-HD Master mixes, sourced, like all the other versions, in DXD 24/352.8kHz resolution.

This is a package as enchanting as it is fascinating, and a technical *tour de force* as well as perfect demonstration material.



**RAVEL** Piano Concerto in G  
**STRAUSS** Metamorphosen  
Hélène Grimaud *pf*  
Chamber Orchestra of Europe / Vladimir Jurowski

EuroArts/Ideale Audience  307 8734

Presented in 1080i video and a choice of stereo PCM or 5.1-channel DTS-HD Master Audio, this is an intimate, no-frills record of the two pieces featured. The camerawork is unfussy to the point of being almost sedate in the Strauss, and the video, while lacking the ultimate "bite" of 1080p, looks impressive even on a very large screen.

When the sound stage and camerawork open up for the Ravel, it's in contrast to the slow, contemplative cinematography of the opening work. But the sound remains excellent, ensuring this disc is as rewarding a listen as it is well worth a watch.

## THE CONSORT OF MUSICKE

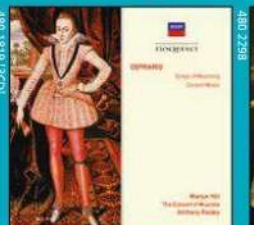
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## CAMBRIDGE AUDIO MINX S325

# Compact surround speaker package with a bold, involving sound

If you want style and performance, this 5.1-channel system is well worth a listen, says **James Vesey**



**T**he Minx range has the feel of a fairly important speaker system for Cambridge Audio. It puts the company head to head with the likes of KEF's long-established KHT series, B&W's MT models and Tannoy's Arenas, pitched at those who want a complete surround system without filling the room with large loudspeakers.

At the heart of the range are small satellite speakers: there's the minute Min10, measuring around 8cm on each side and using a single drive unit, and the larger Min20 model, five of which are used in the S325 package here. This doubles up on the drive units and stands just over 15cm tall by 8cm wide and deep.

All the speakers use the same 5.7cm BMR driver, a flat panel combining the bending motion of early NXT-designed "new transducers" with the pistonic movement of conventional drivers. The design has a

number of advantages over standard "cone and dome" designs, not least of which are improved dispersion – giving a wider "sweet spot" with the best tonal balance – and less drop-off of sound pressure with distance, meaning less amplifier power is needed.

Partnering the satellites is a range of subwoofers, combining powerful onboard amplification with a single driver plus a matching auxiliary bass radiator (two in the smallest subwoofer) to give plenty of low-end clout from a very compact enclosure. The subwoofer in the £800 S325 system is the midrange X300, with a 300W amplifier plus 20cm driver and ABR, in a package around 28cm on each side, standing on 3cm feet.

Whichever configuration, what remains the same is the high-quality aluminium enclosures in a choice of black or white high-gloss lacquer, and built-in wall-mounts for the main speakers, with table or floor stands available.

## PERFORMANCE

The Minx system exudes a feeling of quality to match its style and its price, and with it in place it's clear the performance is on the money, too. That BMR technology gives the small speakers amazing room-filling ability, and there's smooth integration between the various channels as well as between the satellites and subwoofer, making the whole package remarkably easy to set up and fine-tune.

In use, it rapidly becomes clear that the Minx system is never what you'd call dull or laid-back: whether with accompanied solo vocals or a full orchestra and opera chorus it

displays real insight and detail, while a wide-open handling of the high treble means it conjures up plenty of ambience with suitably atmospheric recordings.

I'm not just talking about the stereotypical echoing churches here; whether with the Berlin Philharmonic Blu-ray mentioned in these pages last month or one of the excellent LSO Live SACD titles, the unique dispersion characteristics of the Min20 satellites and that seamless integration ensure the ambience captured on recordings simply wraps around the listener, almost anywhere in the room.

Even if you sit noticeably closer to one of the speakers, there's not that sense of the sound coming from a single point; rather the Minx system retains that winning combination of fine sound stage and effects focus and non-localised sound. Yes, that does also mean it's rather good with those "objects flying round the room" action movies on Blu-ray, although they're rather beyond the remit of this review!

The one note of caution to be sounded is that the open, forthright treble might get overbearing with a brash, all-thrills surround amplifier – but fortunately such products are in the minority these days.

Overall, then, this is a highly attractive system, as well suited to music as it is to more traditional home cinema fare. **C**

## CAMBRIDGE AUDIO MINX S325

**Type** 5.1-channel surround speaker system  
**Price** £800

**Drive units** 2x 5.7cm BMR units in each Min20 satellite, 20cm bass unit and 20cm ABR in X300 subwoofer

**Sensitivity** (Min20) 85dB/W/m

**Impedance** (Min20) 8 ohms compatible

**Power handling** 15-75W Min20, X300 has built-in 300W amplifier

**Frequency response** 130Hz-20kHz Min20, 33Hz (-6dB)-200Hz X300

**Finishes** high gloss black or white

**Dimensions** (HxWxD) 15.4x7.8x8.5cm Min20, 31.1x26.6x27.8cm X300

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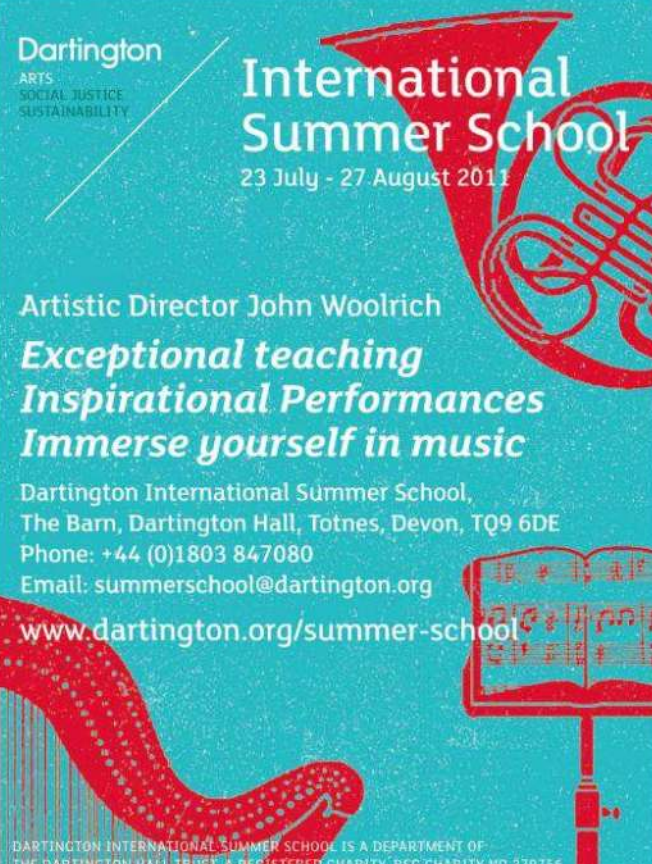
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David Russell

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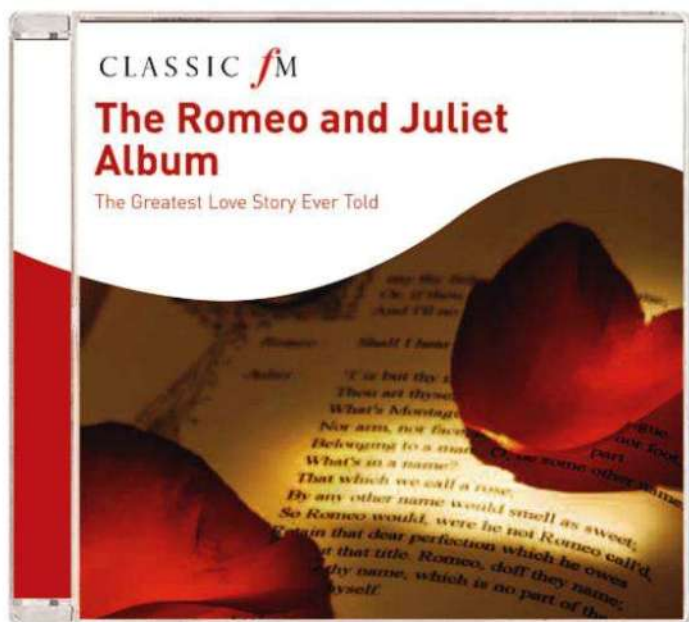


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# My Music

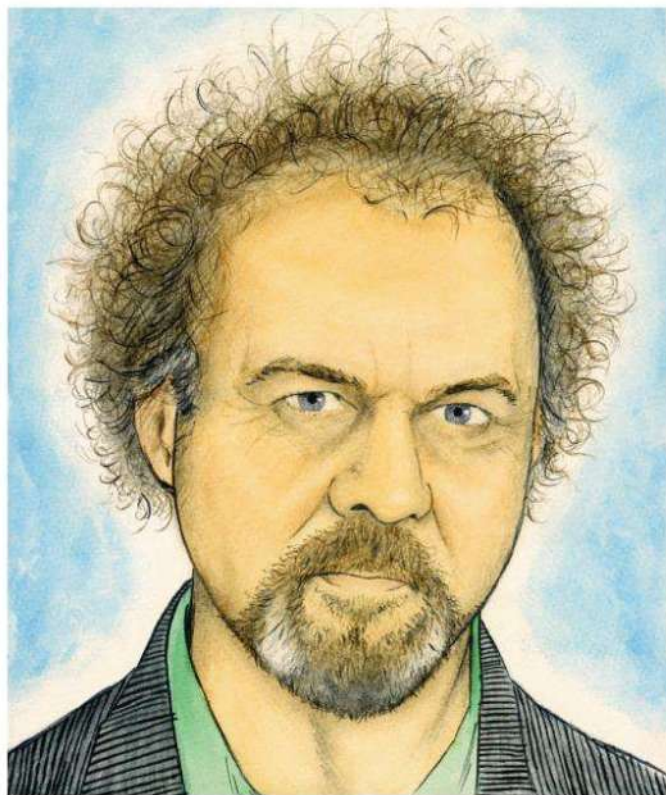
Film director, composer and recent English National Opera recruit  
**Mike Figgis** on maintaining opera's relevance in the modern world

Being the son of an amateur jazz pianist with an amazing record collection gave me a great love of music very early on. I was always fascinated by opera but had an aversion to it as well.

The first three works I directed under my own name were theatre pieces that incorporated film, and in two of these I used classically trained singers, writing a series of songs based on German Lieder for them. I was very interested in the form, and in vocal music in general, but I was trying to integrate music and cinema, and indeed pre-recorded music, into the theatrical experience.

When I was studying music, I read that Wagner believed opera was a wonderful way of bringing together music, poetry and design in one glorious package. I could understand why he believed that but I lived in the time of cinema, and felt that film had somehow overtaken opera as a medium in which all art forms were combined. Opera was rooted in a sense of period and didn't seem to have progressed. It wasn't that I had a problem with the music but rather with the staging and the attempt to make an antique structure seem modern. It was a love-hate thing. I got the concept but was frustrated by its determination to remain the same.

Yet in my artistic life I have always remained obsessively interested in music. I wanted to learn how to compose and play as many instruments as possible, and that drive continues to this day. I got into experimental theatre and was able to start using music in ways that were, I can see, immersed in operatic ideas of structure. Then I morphed into a director and started making films but I never left behind those



**'Music has become a whore of the brothel that is the film industry'**

musical sensibilities – I'm aware that my film *Leaving Las Vegas*, for instance, has much that is operatic about it.

It is sad that cinema, which had so much potential for the Wagnerian operatic concept, has been allowed to go down the toilet. Were Wagner around he would have used cinema in some exciting way. But so much

of what we see in cinemas is lowbrow, and the abuse of music in film is ghastly. It caters to the lowest common denominator and manipulates the emotions. Music has become a whore of the brothel that is the film industry, which is a real shame.

Through the 1940s, that period of the Eastern European exodus, the United States experienced

an incredible raising of the bar musically, with so many great composers arriving, and there were very interesting, often avant-garde uses of music in film. Music is so vital to the form, especially in genre films: in thrillers and horror films, it's the music and sound design that do all the work, so if you turn off the music it becomes silly.

There have been various operatic projects suggested to me over the years. I talked to Philip Glass about the idea of completely reworking his opera *Einstein on the Beach* at one point, but my debut has finally come with an older opera, Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* at English National Opera.

I'm interested in returning it to its time but in a post-modern sense – presenting it to an audience as it would originally have been seen, but in a different context. We can change how we look at art forms of the past simply by framing them differently, so I'm making a film shot in Italy, with an almost identical story to the opera, which will form part of the production and hence create that strong contemporary frame.

This new approach I've found for opera has parallels in the reinterpretation of other types of music, too. Who would deny the power of Glenn Gould taking Bach and playing those pieces on the piano? Or listen to a Beethoven quartet performed on record from the 1930s and compare it to a modern interpretation and the amount of vibrato used. So you can retain a period context, while applying contemporary approaches and technologies, and in a way you can bring out more juice from that period. ●

*Lucrezia Borgia* runs until March 3; visit [www.eno.org](http://www.eno.org)



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